Film Quarterly

FILM CULTURE | DIGITAL | BOOKS & DVDS

PEDRO COSTA'S *COLOSSAL YOUTH*

2007 ROUND-UP

4 MONTHS, 3 WEEKS AND 2 DAYS

EAST ASIAN CINEMA

ANDRÉ BAZIN

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ARTHOUSE ELEPHANT

Film Quarterly covers a selection of recent films (including re-releases) in greater detail than is possible in many other publications. The balance of reasonable timeliness and in-depth analysis reflects our policy of combining the best qualities of journalism and academic writing. Comparison and contextualizing are also key: reviewers are encouraged to find aesthetic and cultural reference points in order to illuminate, and the publication of interconnected essays can bring further light to bear. There are two readings of Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* in this issue, as well as several pieces that treat East Asian cinema: dual-focus reviews by Yvette Bíró and Joan Mellen, Chris Fujiwara's Tokyo report, and Joshua Clover's column on a spectral China.

We want to spark convivial debate and dissent. In that spirit, Leo Braudy initiates the new "Talking Point" column with a skeptical take on *No Country for Old Men*. This column is now open to similarly concise submissions.

Honest, productive debate should involve the closely reasoned defense of value judgments. Criticism loses its edge if it avoids evaluation, though evaluation dissipates its energy if it becomes dogmatic. Better that it be avowedly personal and confidently provisional upon future discussion, as in the issue's centerpiece article, James Naremore's top ten round-up of 2007. Readers will probably not concur with all of his choices, but that is how it should be. The late Raymond Durgnat once wrote: "Readers . . . may well agree with *nothing* [a critic] says, yet still like having a sparring partner." Serious criticism in this mode resembles a stump speech rather than a sermon. It is a matter of argument not fiat. Naremore puts it like this: "to rid discourse of evaluation is also to rid it of politics."

⁂

"My despair was immense," says the teenage Marjane in *Persepolis*. Adolescent melancholy is central to a number of current films, figuring in another animated feature, *Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears a Who!* In the original story and then in Chuck Jones's 1970 twenty-minute version, the minor character of Jo-Jo is a stubborn "shirker," a "young twerp" with a yo-yo. But in the 2008 remake, he is both more prominent and more encumbered. Jo-Jo has become depressed and silent,

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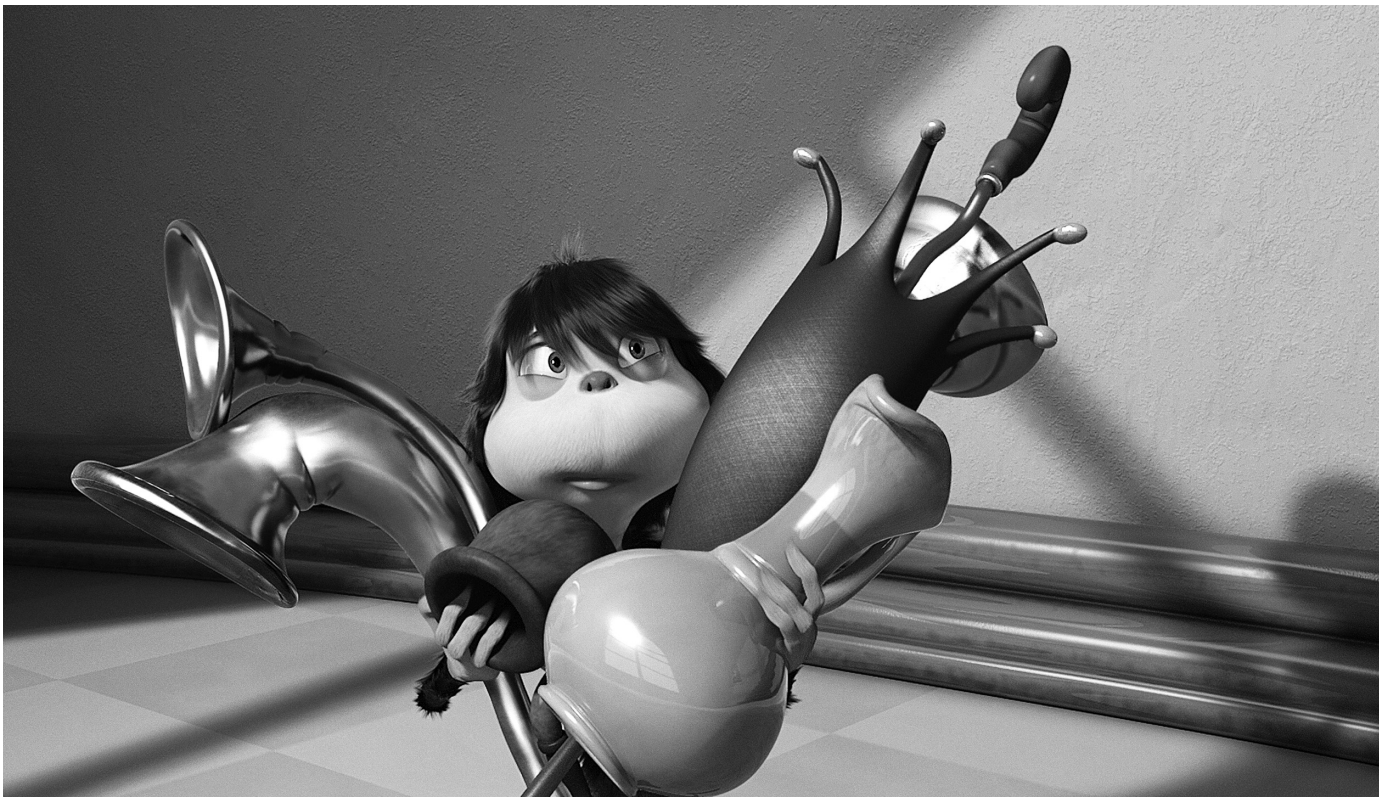
1970 Jo-Jo, carefree

Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears a Who! Director: Chuck Jones. © 1970 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Inc., Turner Entertainment Co. DVD: Warner Home Video (U.K.).

"feeling lonely and sad and tragically misunderstood by his Dad." Alex in *Paranoid Park* (to be reviewed in the next issue) and Găbiţa in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* are so profoundly troubled, they can barely communicate—they are lost souls.

4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days is interestingly comparable to Ozu's *Tokyo Twilight*, which is discussed in Mellen's essay. Ozu's Akiko perhaps says what Găbiţa cannot when she eventually makes the heartbreaking admission: "I want to start my life over again from the beginning." Găbiţa's frightened passivity exasperates her capable friend Otilia as much as Akiko's fragility does her older sister Takako. A large part of the pathos of both stories lies in the depiction of how loving relationships buckle under the strain of severe emotional distress.

That Akiko briefly names her agony where Găbiţa does not is significant. The two films exemplify slightly different kinds of art-cinema reticence. Near the end of *Tokyo Twilight*, Takako starts to weep as she sits near the front door of her father's house. Ozu cuts to a position ninety degrees' away so that the camera is somewhat behind the actress. We do not directly face Takako's sorrow, yet we continue to observe it. In *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* by contrast, crucial and harrowing events take place off-screen, notably when the blackmailing abortionist rapes Găbiţa and Otilia one after the other while the camera remains in the next-door bath-



2008 Jo-Jo, burdened

Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears a Who! Directors: Jimmy Hayward, Steve Martino. © 2008 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.

room, revealing only the other woman's mortified awareness of the unseen assault.

In *Tokyo Twilight* it is as if we have respectfully turned our heads away from a person's pain; in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, the experience is more excruciating. Reticence is the cause of horror and claustrophobia rather than pity. Mungiu uses off-screen action to generate a feeling of outraged panic and immobility. We never have the whole picture and therefore, as Emma Wilson points out, the film "always seems to encompass more than we actually see." Something dangerous is constantly present beyond the edge of the frame. Mungiu's narrow focus simulates the atmospheric pollution that occurs under totalitarianism, suggesting "the complexity of living in such a disturbing system," such that, Ioana Uricaru recalls, "more often than not, it was impossible to realize, at moments of decision, its full set of implications."

⁘

There is another, lighter kind of arthouse reticence too, typified in Godard's *Pierrot le fou*, which D. A. Miller discusses in his "Second Time Around" column. It is difficult to fathom the film's characters. They might even stop seeming like characters so much as ciphers or cut-outs, displaying what Miller calls "a nonplussed surface that may or may not be concealing anything deeper down." Godard's omission is in a way even more radical than Mungiu's, for what is missing is the entire labyrinth of personality. "I want to know exactly who you are," says Ferdinand to Marianne in *Pierrot le fou*. "I'm just a sentimental girl, that's all. Only a fool would make a mystery out of that."

The problem resurfaced for me in *Horton Hears a Who!* In the 1970 version, local gossips are egged on by a scheming kangaroo to vilify Horton. The scene is a delightful spoof of psychobabble: "Horton's skitso-witso-fistic . . . He ought to be psycho-wangwalized." (One bird thoughtfully demurs: "Psychoanalysis is too expensive for an elephant. I hear they charge by the pound.") I must have taken the hint because I wondered for a while what Horton's manic helpfulness might have to do with the fact that there appear to be no other elephants in the Jungle of Nool. Eventually I gave up subtext-hunting. There is no reason to suppose that hidden trauma weighs Horton down as he hurtles out of the jungle carrying a populated wildflower, over a collapsing rickety bridge, to the mountaintop then down again until, without lingering suspicion, it is finally safe to come home—by which time Jo-Jo has cheered up enough to join an ensemble REO Speedwagon singalong. In this case as well, there is no more to it all than meets the eye.

Rob White

THE NEW WORLD SYSTEM

It is surely worth remarking that new movies by Wong Kar-wai and Hou Hsiao-hsien, China's two leading auteurs, were released stateside on the same April weekend. The remark that springs to mind is: where's China?

Wong is the poet of Hong Kong. *Happy Together* excepted, his great films prowl that city's alleys and apartments and noodle shops, from *Chungking Express* (1994) to his stab at pure melodrama, *In the Mood for Love* (2000), set in 1962, the year Wong moved from Shanghai. Even *2046* (2004), which breaks the director's peculiar erotic melancholy across space and time, wheels again and again back to Hong Kong. En route from British crown colony to Special Administrative Region of China, Hong Kong serves as a crossroads for glimpsing the human fate of East Asia on the verge of the new world system, cut loose from colonial history: a semi-global space, in the way that Zhang Ziyi's courtesan is a semi-professional, and the movie's residential hotel a semi-public place.

Hou is the patient master of Taiwan's New Wave; in his work, the city is the locus of traumatic history (*City of Sadness* [1989]) as well as contemporary anxieties (*Millennium Mambo* [2001]) and sometimes both (*Three Times* [2005]). The drama of the Chinese Civil War and the national wound that is Taiwan are rarely far from his low, flawless frames.

What then of these new films? Hou's *Flight of the Red Balloon* is French in language and financing, and fixed in Paris, mostly in a single apartment. As if to bring out her westernality, Juliette Binoche has a heavy blonde dye job—as shocking as Bardot's black wig in *Contempt* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963). Present-day Paris is washed out, far from the lush colors of *Three Times*; Binoche plays a puppeteer overcommitted to her craft and her fissured inner life. This means she needs a nanny, floating quietly after her seven-year-old charge like a watchful balloon: Song Fang, a former Beijing film student who is also occupied remaking Albert Lamorisse's children's classic, *The Red Balloon* (1956). At one point Binoche watches Song's movie: "It had an abstract quality. It reminded me of childhood." This is a lovely enough verdict on some of Hou's greatest sequences, but *Flight of the Red Balloon* is less abstract than vague, and not in the French sense. Meanwhile it is strikingly concrete that nothing of China remains in this film but for displaced transnational labor.

Blonde Binoche

Flight of the Red Balloon. Photo: Tsai cheng-tai. Courtesy IFC First Take.

There is even less of China in *My Blueberry Nights*. In some regard the film resembles the recent rash of J-horror recreations for the domestic market, or Michael Haneke's American clone of his own *Funny Games* (2008), except there's no single source film. Instead it goes about the heartbreaking business of transposing Wong tropes and types into an American key: a remake without an original. Hong Kong noodle shops become Downtown bakery cafés, ambience becomes decor, charged waiting becomes mere boredom. The fundamental Wong drama, between cultural circulation and rootedness, returns as mere road trip. The casting of Norah Jones remains mysterious; a Brooklyn native, her screen English is less convincing than Maggie Cheung's. Only a late encounter with Natalie Portman as a lacquered poker stud (another semi-professional) makes sense; Portman is a costume jewel of an actor, which is about right for Wong. Everything else is wrong. One is left with the sense that the American translation of Wong Kar-wai is "Jim Jarmusch." Someone will think that's good news. Wong Kar-wai, I am trying to chase you back to Hong Kong: be a poet again.

Neither director has any obligation to represent their respective homes for us. It is striking nonetheless that these departures come just as China—country and keyword—has sedimented to the heart of western anxieties about the near future. If Hou and Wong have abandoned China for a dream-like Paris or imaginary Americana, those places have returned the complement. *Boarding Gate* (Olivier Assayas, 2007),

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Ghosts of China

Left: *My Blueberry Nights.* © 2007 The Weinstein Company/MaCall Polay. Right: *Be Kind Rewind.* Photo: Abbot Genser/New Line Cinema.

which opened in the U.S. just in advance of Blueberry Balloon weekend, begins in Paris. But there's little local color; it's Paris as untethered cosmopole, floating above the globe and connected only to distant world cities. The characters—American, French and French African, Taiwanese and from Hong Kong—work as import-exporters and fund managers, endlessly circulating physical and abstract value. Caught up in all of it is international sexpot Asia Argento; her character Sandra, a former prostitute now employed by shady Golden Eagle impex, circulates like money itself. In too deep, she schemes to get out, open a little club. In Beijing, of course. Where the future lives.

The movie is a gripping, doomed attempt to represent the unrepresentable situation of globalization, and the abstract processes at its core (abstraction with a vengeance, you might say). In this quest, all roads now lead to China. After the requisite amount of relationship talk and sexy outfits (personal stuff, pointedly so), we are following Sandra in a jagged and panicky flight into the labyrinth of global capital, literalized as the opaque, chaotic streets and back rooms of Hong Kong, sprawling without any identifiable order beneath the city's ringed and blinking skyline. The jittery handheld and cool blue filters offer a push-pull: desperation you can't quite touch. Deeper and deeper in she goes. But if there is a "hidden abode of production," we never see it clear; just episodic flashes, implacable and cool and brutal—and the suggestion they are all connected, like the narrative, in some order exceeding our comprehension. It seems almost an unnecessary fillip when we discover, in passing, that Golden Eagle has a sideline—a mainline?—in pirated Chinese DVDs.

But perhaps the most China-haunted cinema of the season is French-directed, set in the faded industrial city of Passaic, New Jersey, and never mentions China. The plot of *Be Kind Rewind* (Michel Gondry, 2008) centers around a video store still stuck on VHS tapes, analog in a digital world—a prosaic allegory of the incomplete shift from industrial to finance capital. The plot requires these tapes get erased via zany hijincks, so our plucky heroes Mos Def and Jack Black take to remaking them one by one, replacing the Hollywood originals with brief, bumblingly improvised versions—a process Black calls "sweding." "It's a country, not a verb," he's told. It's also a smash with the locals; demand outpaces supply. Shortly the duo finds itself a trio, and eventually a cast and crew of dozens, everyone in on it and finally delighted to be consuming the very films they produce. What an odd little parable of unalienated labor! Even neighborhood sourpuss Mia Farrow joins in; after all, early in the film, someone says, "She's a communist." Eventually, Sigourney Weaver shows up as the MPAA party-pooper, with "3.15 billion in fines" and a steamroller for the sweded tapes: "the entire film industry is crumbling because of pirates and bootleggers!"

That line alone is enough to fix the allegory: the land from whence springs cheap knockoffs that confound Hollywood ain't Sweden. Neither is it New Jersey. This is the China of our dreams: half cheap, fast, and out-of-control hyper-capitalist production zone; half the last bastion of collective life. It's this fantasy which glows within the film's profoundly ambitious ending, in which the entire town watches a fictionalized documentary about Fats Waller, made by themselves for themselves: a mass of semi-professionals who have rescued themselves from abstraction. It aspires to something like the populist upwelling of *It's A Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946), and doesn't miss by much. It's just that it's a kind of populism that isn't at home in America anymore. Here comes China.

JOSHUA CLOVER is the author of *The Matrix* (BFI Modern Classics, 2004).

THE RISE OF THE "STUDIO INDEPENDENTS"

Subsidiaries of the major studios, such as Sony Classics (formed in 1991) or Fox Searchlight (1994), have long acquired independent films for distribution. But recently all the main players have seemed to recognize a profit potential not just in acquiring, but also in producing "specialty" films. Consequently the "studio independents" have been born: Universal created Focus Features in 2002, Warner Bros. founded Warner Independent Pictures in 2003, Disney bought Miramax in 2005, and Paramount launched Paramount Vantage in 2006. Run like their respective parent corporations, these mini-studios bear a twofold mandate: to acquire finished films and also to develop and produce marketable films. Two recent examples illustrate the success of this strategy.

Little Miss Sunshine, an indie comedy of family dysfunction, shot for thirty days in the summer of 2005 in southern California and Arizona with a budget of $8 million. A year later, on 18 August 2006, Fox Searchlight released the movie in the U.S., and it went on to win Best Feature at the Independent Spirit Awards. The film also received four Academy Award nominations (including Best Picture and Best Director for first-timers Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris) and won both Best Supporting Male for Alan Arkin and Best Original Screenplay for first-timer Michael Arndt. A small film that became a phenomenon, *Little Miss Sunshine* grossed over $100 million worldwide.

Juno, an indie comedy of family dysfunction, shot for thirty days in the spring of 2007 in Vancouver with a budget of $6.5 million. Eight months later, on 5 December 2007, Fox Searchlight released *Juno* in the U.S., and it went on to win Best Feature at the Independent Spirit Awards. The film also received four Academy Award nominations (including Best Picture, Best Actress for Ellen Page, and Best Director for second-timer Jason Reitman) and won Best Original Screenplay for first-timer Diablo Cody. A small film that became a phenomenon, *Juno* grossed over $200 million worldwide.

Historically a film was considered independent if it raised its financing without a studio (and therefore without guaranteed distribution). *Little Miss Sunshine* followed this traditional independent film model. Directors Dayton and Faris were attached to the project for years before independently raising the financing. The finished film premiered at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival, where Fox Searchlight bought it for U.S. distribution (for over $10 million, one of the biggest deals in Sundance history). By contrast, *Juno* was produced and financed directly by Fox Searchlight from its inception. That is to say, *Juno*, while perhaps independent-minded in content, began its life cycle like a studio film, with executive oversight and U.S. distribution. But what effect does this distinction have on the creative process?

Almost all studio-financed films pass through a script stage known as development. Sometimes lasting years, development refers to the period in which the script is adjusted to incorporate story notes from producers and studio executives. While the script for *Juno* was a notable exception in that it was green-lit without changes (a rarity in Hollywood), most scripts get revised significantly in development. During this process harsher edges are often smoothed down, and many of the hallmarks of independent films, such as tone shifts, unsympathetic characters, and controversial subject matter, may be removed. For good or bad, it is during this phase that a script often comes to more closely resemble other scripts. Consequently one might argue that studio-independent productions are less original or controversial than true independents, although in today's marketplace even independently financed films feel the pressure to "self-develop," as edgier fare will have greater difficulty finding a release.

Another perceptible difference between an independent and a studio-independent film is the way in which it is packaged. Packaging is the process by which the creative team, especially cast, is assembled for a project. Independent films are usually what are known as "passion projects" and the director is often attached before the financing; so too, in many cases, are key cast members, who will have made a commitment on the basis of enthusiasm for the script rather than any financial incentive. Potential investors in such a film are therefore presented with a complete package (script, budget, director, and actors), as was the case with *Little Miss Sunshine* and my own independent film *11:14* (2003). By contrast, with studio films all elements, including the director, are packaged. In the case of *Juno*, Fox Searchlight first bought the script and then attached director Jason Reitman, who had previously achieved commercial success for the studio with *Thank You For Smoking* (2005). All casting choices then had

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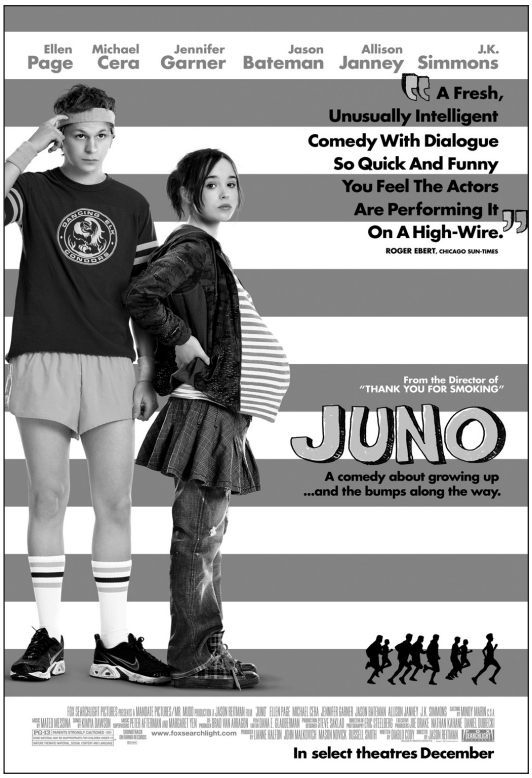

Runaway successes

Courtesy Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation

to be approved by the studio. While not as common a phenomenon among studio independents, the casting decisions of studios are often influenced by actors' perceived box-office potential, perhaps leading to less original or appropriate casting. (But again, independent films are not exempt from these pressures either. Once I obtained financing for *11:14*, many discussions were had with the financier about the roles not yet cast, mostly involving lists of actors who supposedly ensured strong foreign box-office returns.)

If the Academy Awards are any indication, studio independents are on the rise. In 2003, the year *The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King* took home Best Picture at the Academy Awards, it was big news that Focus Features' small film *Lost in Translation* got a nomination. The next year it was Fox Searchlight's turn: *Sideways* was similarly nominated alongside four major studio films. Then, in both 2005 and 2006, three of the Best Picture nominations went to films not released by major studios. By 2007 this was true of almost all the films nominated: *Atonement* was released by Focus Features, *Juno* was released by Fox Searchlight, and both *No Country for Old Men* and *There Will Be Blood* were released by Paramount Vantage and Miramax. (The fifth, *Michael Clayton*, was a Warner Bros. release.) *There Will Be Blood* so far has made $75 million worldwide, *Michael Clayton* has made $80 million worldwide, and *No Country for Old Men* has made over $150 million worldwide to date. In the case of three of the nominated films (*Juno*, *No Country for Old Men*, and *There Will Be Blood*), the distribution company also served as a financing entity.

Independent filmmaking used to be risky business. The investor, often a single wealthy individual, assumed all the initial risk by funding the production. But the trend toward so many studio-independent films suggests that the studios believe they have lowered the risks associated with making independent-style films. Today gambling on independents seems to be rapidly becoming big business. When a similar film for a similar budget makes $100 million more than its predecessor a mere year earlier, you can safely bet others will attempt to replicate that model. And with expectations of financial success, studio-independent films could soon be produced with the same pressures and expectations as their bigger-budget counterparts. Some studio-independent companies have already spawned commercial subdivisions—as when Fox Atomic, founded in 2006, split off from Fox Searchlight to make genre films such as *The Hills Have Eyes II* and *28 Weeks Later* (both 2007). While there is no rule which determines that a film will wind up better or worse depending on whether it was bought by a studio before or after its production, the likelihood is that as studio-independent films make more money they will start to feel much more "studio" than "independent."

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WHOSE COUNTRY?

Now that the desert desperation and motiveless malignity of *No Country for Old Men* (2007) has been showered with awards from the Directors Guild, the Screen Actors Guild, and finally the Oscar for Best Director(s) and Best Picture, it's worth mulling over what the film, apart from its directorial panache, is actually about.

Consider the story: a hapless young man (Josh Brolin) scraping by with a young wife, happens on some big money left among the mayhem from a drug deal gone bad. After a brief internal struggle over the wisdom of mixing into such events, he takes the money and is in turn pursued by a relentless killer (Javier Bardem), who gradually mows down everyone who gets in his way, including the hapless young man and finally his wife.

There's also a sheriff, played by Tommy Lee Jones, who makes some feeble efforts to catch the inexorable killer but finally decides to sit around with his deputy and sundry other people to philosophize about how times have changed and such implacable murderers weren't around in the good old days. The sheriff is given some voiceovers in the film that might imply he has a wider view of the grim situation but, unlike the first-person narration he gets in Cormac McCarthy's novel, it is the detached, omniscient eye of the author/director(s) that encompasses whatever final truths the novel/film believes it is purveying.

If you think about the film in genre terms, it could be considered a nice comic turnaround of a classic Western plot. We all remember the stranger who comes into town at the beginning of the movie, cleans up the villains and general corruption, and leaves at the end. Only this time, the stranger is a cold-blooded killer who ventilates most of the rest of the characters—except the philosophical sheriff—and then goes on his way, hindered only by an interesting accident—about which more in a minute.

In the mix there's also more than a little of another classic plot turn, this time from film noir, where a struggling young man comes accidentally upon illegitimate money and spends the rest of the film either trying to escape from his pursuers or give it back or, in the case of a great Don Siegel film named *Charley Varrick* (1973), to outwit the baddies at their own game.

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I shouldn't say "baddies" in such a jokey way, though, since *No Country for Old Men* is hardly going for the obvious pratfalls, although one friend of mine reported that he laughed all the way through, much to the upset of the people sitting nearby. The Coen brothers, who directed it, are known for their comic films, but Cormac McCarthy, who wrote the novel on which the film is based, is hardly a vendor of knee-slappers. Ever since his breakthrough novel *Blood Meridian* in 1985 he has been the go-to writer for grim and virtually unrelieved stories of death and mayhem presented in an intriguing blend of Faulknerian melodrama and Hemingway-esque macho posturing, although often, as in Mathew Brady's photographs of the Civil War, the mayhem takes place off-screen, before the hapless viewers come upon it.

But back to the story and that tantalizing question: what is this movie, now so celebrated and rewarded, actually about?

When I was working on a book about war and masculinity, many men recommended Cormac McCarthy's books to me. That's what they were about I was told, and I did find in them a certain style of masculine brutality—tribal and bloodthirsty, as if the author's saving grace was to face unflinchingly the dog-eat-dog world, wrapped lovingly in his prose.

The title here gives the point away: the "old man," the sheriff we presume, can't figure out how to deal with this new breed of criminal. This is no confrontation of equals at noon on a windswept desert street. This killer just blows people away, after a few gnomic remarks (longer in the novel) about his philosophy of justice.

In the Yeats poem McCarthy lifts the title from, the message is to leave the country and go to a place where the old are appreciated for their wisdom and their ability to create. But as McCarthy and the Coens use the phrase, it thinly veils a basic misanthropy and disgust with human behavior. The only answer is to retreat into private pleasures, which are at best fleeting and frequently just veil more pain.

No Country for Old Men turns the Western idea of redemption and renewal in nature inside out. Westerns like *The Wild Bunch* (1969) or *Unforgiven* (1992) similarly criticize the myths of the west, but they give us in return a perspective on both the usefulness of those myths and their ultimate failure. The violence in such films, like that in *There Will Be Blood* (2007), makes a profound point about the costs

Morality in the shadows

No Country for Old Men. © 2007 Miramax Film Corporation, Paramount Vantage. DVD: Buena Vista Home Entertainment.

of physical and moral survival in a vicious world. Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis), the main character in *There Will Be Blood*, loosely based on the pioneering California oilman Edward L. Doheny, faces a similarly brutal world and indulges in violence himself. But as the film unfolds, we see how he has been warped by the determined individualism he has embraced and how he bears the consequences.

What does *No Country for Old Men* show? There is evil in the world that can never be dealt with. It is inexorable, it has no conscience or human nature that can be appealed to, and it is foreign (casting Bardem as a character named Anton Chigurh certainly allows for a potpourri of ethnicities). To make matters even more fatal and stereotyped, the Coens have pared away from the novel even the small suggestions of Chigurh's human nature McCarthy allowed him.

One shot in *No Country for Old Men* gives a glimmer of a film that could be respected as well as admired: the sheriff, for once out of his garrulous lethargy, goes to search the cabin of a suspicious motel. As he opens the door, his shadow, complete with cowboy hat and guns, appears on the wall—all that's left. It used to be that the physical force of the young criminal would be met and defeated by the wisdom and guile of the old lawman. Not here. Bardem and Jones might as well exist in two different movies. Even when they almost confront each other, it seems visually as if they are in different rooms of this ratty motel, each playing out his own game of genre solitaire.

Towards the end of the film, we might wonder why the sheriff, who is perfectly aware of what Chigurh is capable, doesn't try to protect the young wife. Who knows? Too busy philosophizing. The only event that seems momentarily to halt the killer's inevitable success is the happenstance car accident. Fate meets Chance, a perfect collision in McCarthy's nihilistic cosmos.

To praise *No Country for Old Men* for its play with genre celebrates the ultimate victory of style over meaning, a trap for the Coens ever since *Blood Simple* (1984). Only in a post-9/11 world, with darkness and paranoia so close to hand, could Cormac McCarthy, with his overweening attention to style and his absence of any meaning beyond despair be considered a major author. He is less the Faulkner or Hemingway of our time than the Mickey Spillane, attuned to all the insecurities of American culture and exaggerating them even further—although Spillane at least managed to create a hero. The only hero in the novel *No Country for Old Men* is the author, whose bleak vision we are asked to applaud, just as the only hero in the movie are the directors, whose virtuosity is supposed to inspire similar praise. As Joel Coen remarked when they accepted the Oscar, "We're very thankful to all of you out there for letting us continue to play in our corner of the sandbox"—a perfect example of the superficial sense of style-above-all with which they approached *No Country For Old Men*, leaving the rest of us with the emptiness of the film and the world it depicts.

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4 MONTHS, 3 WEEKS AND 2 DAYS: THE CORRUPTION OF INTIMACY

IOANA URICARU ANALYZES A POWERFUL DEPICTION OF ROMANIAN LIFE UNDER COMMUNISM

"I wanted very much to start the film with the silence that occurs in a conversation right after you have asked somebody for a little more than you should have," Cristian Mungiu said in an interview about *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*. The film is bookended by two heavy silences which are actually pauses, before and after, alluding to a world of untold dramas outside the purview of the narrative. Set in 1987, at the height (and right before the fall) of communist dictatorship in Romania, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* is a film made by a writer–director–producer who lived through the period (he was born in 1968), and is now a contributor to a new historiographical tendency in post-socialist Romania, which seeks to testify about the past without vehemence or nostalgia.

In 2001, Mungiu made his feature debut, *Occident/ Go West*, a bittersweet comedy; five years later, he wrote a screenplay entitled *Tales from the Golden Age*, made up of six vignettes that are a nostalgic, amusing, and nearly endearing portrait of life under communism. "I gave the screenplay to several people who read it and found it very funny. The younger readers' response was along the lines of: 'It must have been cool to live in those days.' I realized something was wrong—I didn't think it was appropriate to remember life under dictatorship as having been 'cool'." In response, Mungiu set the earlier project aside in order to make *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, a film about the human cost of the Ceauşescu regime. It won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 2007. Mungiu used his acceptance speech to acknowledge the strength of contemporary Romanian films. And indeed Cristi Puiu's *Stuff and Dough* (2000) and *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* (2005), as well as Corneliu Porumboiu's *12:08 East of Bucharest* (2006), which similarly "come from reality, not from other films," as Mungiu put it elsewhere, testify to that strength. (*Tales from the Golden Age* is still going to be released in the near future; only two of the vignettes are to be directed by Mungiu, though he is producing the others.)

In discussing the impact of *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2* Days, it is important to note that Romanian cinema did not have a New Wave in the 1960s or 70s. The 2000s, with 2000 being the "year zero" when no film was produced in Romania, are this country's moment in the history of cinema. It is significant that this revival—which extends the legacy both of the 1970s feminist project and of the deeply humanist Italian and Czech schools—is happening in a country that had been saturated with official discourse, which was imposed on its citizens from above. Most of the resistance to this discourse was practised at an individual level, within the family or among friends. By steering clear of overt judgments or intellectual commentary, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* situates us in a world whose meaning is only intelligible at this interpersonal level. Thus the everyday scale of historical opposition to totalitarianism is properly acknowledged.

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The storyline of *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* is simple: Otilia (Anamaria Marinca) does everything to help her college roommate, Găbiţa (Laura Vasiliu), who is far along in an unwanted pregnancy, to get an illegal abortion. During the first forty minutes, suspense builds as we follow Otilia preparing for an as-yet-unknown task: she borrows money, takes care of a hotel reservation, worries about a plastic tablecloth (whose gruesome utility is to be revealed later), and meets a mysterious man who goes by the name of Bebe (Vlad Ivanov). Once Otilia, Găbiţa, and Bebe gather in the hotel room, we witness a chilling round of negotiations during which the women are reluctant to say the word "abortion" and Bebe never says the word "sex" (replacing it with the euphemism "being nice"). After having sex with this abusive stranger as part payment for the abortion, Otilia has to go through more circles of hell: sitting through an exasperating family reunion at the house of her boyfriend Adi (Alexandru Potocean), then

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Oleg Mutu (left) and Cristian Mungiu

4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days. © 2007 Mobra Films.

walking around the city at night in a terrifying search for somewhere to deposit the dead fetus in her purse.

In order to accurately reconstruct the greyness of Romanian life under Ceauşescu, production designer Mihaela Poenaru avoided any vividly colored objects (with the exception of Bebe's red automobile). The image was further desaturated through a bleach-bypass procedure in the developing of the negative and through the use of digital intermediates (a first in Romanian film production). The sound is remarkable in its subtlety: the first thing we hear is the ticking clock in the dorm room, then there is the hyper-real squeaking of Bebe's leather jacket, the ever-present echoing hallways and dog barks, and the pathetic thump of the fetus falling through a trash chute. Otilia's journey is documented by a careful yet unflinching camera that follows her relentlessly, without the help of editing (most scenes are shot in one take, and some of them are nearly ten minutes long) and without the support of musical score, effects, dollies, or cranes—nothing that could in any way distract us from the story or make our spectatorship easier. In fact, there is no use of a tripod or a Steadicam either—which gives a subtle trembling even to the long, static scenes (such as the family dinner), evoking the fluid nature of subjectivity and positing life as a precarious balancing act. Cinematographer Oleg Mutu holds his camera on a continuum of intermediate positions, between floating as if in a thick fluid and hurrying to keep up with the action with no concern for smoothness. This shooting technique eliminates the possibility of visual commentary: there is no external, safe, stable position from where the commentary could be directed. On two key occasions in the film, Otilia is not the focus of attention. We do not see the sexual molestation taking place, but later we are forced to contemplate the result of the abortion while Otilia is somewhere off-screen, frantically looking for a bag. We have to draw our own conclusion about the different

Dead nature and a lethal stare

4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days. © 2007 Mobra Films. DVD: BAC Vidéo (France).

ways in which the two traumatic events will continue to burden Otilia and the irresponsible, self-victimizing Găbiţa.

Mungiu relinquishes all obvious tools of emotional manipulation, going for an essential, ruthless intensity, partly achieved through his handling of suggestive details, which work on literal but also on subliminal levels. The abortion procedure is not conventionally gruesome, but is nevertheless excruciating. Because there is so little sound or commotion as Bebe inserts the probe into Găbiţa as she lies on the hotel bed, we do not reflexively look away. Our reaction is one of nausea rather than shock, a feeling which is contributed to also by Otilia's nosebleeds and the final enumeration of food menu items ("liver, breaded brains, marrow . . .") and aspects of the aesthetic. With no pans, no tilts unless strongly required by the movement in the frame, flat space, mostly natural light, framing that cuts off characters' heads if necessary, using off-screen space to suggest that, in Mungiu's words, "this world is much bigger than what you see on the screen," there is a constant impression of confinement, which leads to a feeling perhaps like seasickness.

It is worth noting therefore that the celebrated and oftenmentioned minimalism of *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* is actually an *impression of minimalism*, achieved through painstaking attention to detail, carefully choreographed movements, and an elaborate shooting strategy. For example, Mungiu disclosed that: "We strove to keep the camera axis always perpendicular on a wall. Every time we pointed it at corners, it simply didn't work." The aesthetic is a rigorous one: the director rejected ostentatious authorial commentary —no close-ups, no unmotivated camera movements, no angles that did not correspond to the characters' positions, but also no symbolic or allegorical devices. There is only one metaphorical suggestion in the film, as the protagonists are initially likened to a couple of colorful exotic fish that would have no problem surviving forty-eight hours of hardship, then to a couple of dead, disgustingly colorless fish in a still life painting (in Romanian, "still life" is called "dead nature") and eventually the discreet final suggestion of this world being just an immense fish tank into which the audience is looking through the transparent cinematic fourth wall.

The things that are absent from the film are just as meaningful as those that are present. At least three times something dangerous *almost* happens, and possible alternative stories are suggested: Otilia picks up a knife from Bebe's briefcase but does not follow up on whatever crossed her mind; she is later teased by police officers at the hotel's reception, but they are thankfully too busy joking with the manager; a stranger approaches her in the dead of night and turns out to

be just a harmless passer-by. A conversation between Otilia and Adi implies that she might be pregnant as well, but this issue is never clarified. There are other omissions too. One of the most remarkable features of *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* is that it succeeds in being extremely accurate about life during communism and yet it has absolutely no reference to Ceauşescu and never employs the appellative "comrade." We are thus confronted with the revelation that what are used as stereotypical shortcuts to remembering the dictatorship were not actually its most effective tools.

The subtle and perverse nature of Romanian totalitarianism was that it managed to penetrate its subjects' intimacy, psychology, and identity at a level that was much more profound and subversive than the state propaganda. While it was relatively easy to resist the cult of personality and to laugh at exaggerated reports of economic successes, it was much more difficult to even diagnose what the twisted gender politics, the intricate system of arbitrary interdictions, and the collection of social constraints were actually doing to our minds as we were attempting to adapt and survive. While trying to arrange the room reservation at the hotel, Otilia has to beg two receptionists who take turns at ignoring, patronizing, and belittling her. Even when the dues (the pack of Kent cigarettes) are paid, the clerks persist in their threatening rudeness. That a hotel receptionist should be a person of authority to whom Otilia has to report her comings and goings, explain her personal problems, and beg for a favor is a telling mechanism of a society set up as a Stanford prison experiment: half the population was, in one way or another, given power over the other half.

The increasingly uncomfortable dinner scene, where Otilia is trapped among unsympathetic if well-meaning people, offers a glimpse into the unbearable situation of college students who were completely dependent on their parents and placed at the mercy of the government, opting for a lifelong occupation based on which specialty would minimize their chances of being dispatched to a rural area. The feeling of being surveilled and having no real choices, always locked into a set of given circumstances, is suggested as the audience is also locked into an uncomfortably fixed, frontal perspective, reminiscent of Buñuel's parody of the Last Supper in *Viridiana* (1961). Without the mercy of time ellipsis or alternate angles, we are condemned to sit among these strangers and listen to their self-important small talk, while wishing that we were somewhere else, maybe checking on Găbiţa, who could be bleeding to death in the hotel room.

The refocusing on everyday lives marks a silent revolt against grand narratives, impersonal statements about history,

Trapped

4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days. © 2007 Mobra Films. DVD: BAC Vidéo (France).

Satirical supper

Viridiana. © 1961 Uninci S.A., Films 59. DVD: Arrow Films (U.K.).

angry commentary, and unnatural dialogue that had become a staple of many Romanian films in the 1990s. But the verisimilitude is avowedly a construction by the filmmakers. As Mungiu put it: "I found it frustrating that in Romanian movies, people didn't talk like in everyday life. Many spectators assume that the actors in *4*32 are non-professionals, that I allowed them to improvise. They are well-trained actors and there's not one word in the film that hadn't been written in the script."

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The gender politics of *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* are painfully intimate. Bebe verbally abuses his elderly mother, who still worries about her son's well-being, and this seems to be the paradigm of his relationship with women. He displays a clear delight in exercising his power not only in the sexual blackmail, but more perversely, in the almost paternal way in which he talks to Găbiţa during the abortion, reassuring her about the contents of his syringe just a few minutes after he has raped her. He almost connects to Otilia in the car when they talk about her home town, and the advantages of an Engineering degree—a mere half hour before he is to rape her as well.

Ivanov's nuanced performance gives a particularly perverse finish to this villain: his voice stays calm, he has the verbal patterns and the hand gestures of a guy who maybe has a few subordinates at work and likes tormenting them with a mocking tone and veiled threats. He constantly addresses the two women with the courtesy pronoun, which obliges them to do the same; even after he yells at Otilia using a thick curse she continues to address him in the deferential mode. He takes his time teasing them: "I'm not judging you," "You're the ones who came to me for help," "I think you're the ones in a hurry," "Did I ever mention money?", letting them simmer as they slowly come to understand that he demands sexual favors in exchange for his services. He performs a silent ritual of pseudo-medical preparation, supposedly sterilizing the instruments, and as we instinctively count all the reasons why his handling of the procedure is irresponsible and dangerous, we also register the girls' complete lack of reaction to this masquerade: they are now completely subdued. A grimace of impatience crosses his face when Otilia clumsily assists him during the abortion procedure, and as long as they are in his presence both women feel intimidated and insecure. Otilia, who has already shown how enterprising she can be, has no strategy to match Bebe's scheme. When she tries to assert herself and reduce the deal back to a money transaction, Bebe quickly reminds her that he has the upper hand ("What, are you trying to put me in my place now?" he says, almost amused). Throughout their ordeal, they never stop calling him "sir," and he never stops being condescending—even when he yells, he uses the words "miss" and "girl," indicating that he is more annoyed as one would be with dumb servants than angry as one would be with a real adversary.

The other significant male character is Adi. Otilia's boyfriend is clueless as to what she is going through, but it is suggested that he is clueless because he is not interested. When Otilia talks to him in the dark hallway of his parents' apartment, Adi's line "calm down, will you" is delivered with a self-assured, condescending tone, and the specific Romanian expression he uses is the kind of patronizing, contemptuous wording we might expect from Bebe. A man from whom Găbiţa asks for a cigarette outside the hotel elevator gives her a look that summarizes all the social prejudices burdening females in a society that is *both* patriarchal and totalitarian: a young woman who is hanging out in a hotel lobby and addresses a stranger is probably fair game for soliciting sexual favors.

Attempting to reconnect with the spectator at the most personal level, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* respectfully acknowledges the complexity of living in such a disturbing system and the fact that, more often than not, it was impossible to realize, at moments of decision, its full set of implications. What is therefore highlighted is the heroism of Otilia. What kind of amazing history of bonding must she have in common with Găbiţa in order to motivate the sacrifices she makes? The blunt, non-explanatory, non-evaluative style of the film makes the point that there may be no specific answer to the question, no single motivation. It does not even necessarily follow that there is a deep connection between the two women. As Mungiu puts it: "The point is that one shouldn't be ready to make sacrifices only for someone with whom they have a deep, special bond." Otilia builds and crosses a bridge of human solidarity that is "unthinkable only to people who wouldn't be able to do so themselves." Without formulating abstract arguments or pompous motivations, Otilia instinctively resists the most effective and least obvious tool of this totalitarian regime: the contamination and corruption of intimate human relationships.

Laura Vasiliu (left) and Cristian Mungiu

4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days. © 2007 Mobra Films. DVD: BAC Vidéo (France).

By a 1966 decree, abortion was banned in Romania under Ceauşescu. The lesser-known fact is that so was any kind of contraception—women were expected to have five children before they would be legally allowed to control their bodies. Therefore, abortion was not seen as a right or a freedom, it came to be the only way to deal with an unwanted pregnancy and a pitiful, traumatic form of resistance in a world where women's bodies were being checked, registered, and surveilled—I remember the appointment cards that arrived periodically in the mail, summoning my mother to random, mandatory gynecological examinations. The interdiction of contraception and abortion were the ultimate intrusion in people's personal lives. Sexuality itself became a burden and a source of anxiety for women, reinforcing the phobias of the rural, Orthodox tradition of Romania. Counting on the fact that this masculinist culture would never put the burden of planning and responsibility on the men, the governmental policy created one more instrument of domination that was perversely employed by each male in the privacy of his own home. Otilia's reproaches to her boyfriend are meant to evoke exactly that—men became unwilling collaborators of the regime because ultimately the consequences of their behavior would be born (literally) by women. An immense guilt and anxiety poisoned the most intimate of relationships—between men and women as well as between women and their children, who many times were unwanted and exceeded the mother's capacity for nurturing. Women were expected to work full-time, bear and raise several children, and do all the housework, while being underpaid and living in an economy where procuring food was an adventure. Therefore the reasons or motivations for having an abortion had very little to do with principles of ethics or personal freedom. Găbiţa is never depicted as having a real choice to make. However, the image of the aborted fetus unmistakably registers the consequences of an act that quietly horrifies the two women.

There is no didactic message about policy or ethics in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*. The film shows the catastrophe of state coercion that reaches into the most intimate realms of personal life. Didacticism would undermine the force of the film's politics and its achievement in recalibrating the sampling rate of historical time to fit the size of human experience.

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ABSTRACT Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* shares with other recent Romanian films, notably *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* (2005) and *12:08 East of Bucharest* (2006), a preoccupation with accessing large-scale phenomena (politics, history, society) through the narrow focus of meticulously observed individual stories.

KEYWORDS Cristian Mungiu, communism, abortion, Romania, long take, minimalism

CREDITS *4 luni, 3 saptamâni si 2 zile*. Director, producer, screenplay: Cristian Mungiu. Producer, director of photography: Oleg Mutu. Editor: Dana Bunescu. © 2007 Mobra Films.

4 MONTHS, 3 WEEKS AND 2 DAYS: AN "ABORTION MOVIE"?

EMMA WILSON ARGUES THAT THE CHIEF CONCERN OF CRISTIAN MUNGIU'S FILM IS A FRIENDSHIP PUT UNDER INTOLERABLE STRAIN

In a letter to *Sight and Sound* (April 2008), a reader comments that he has seen no reviews of *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* by female critics, leading him to claim that "this [is] an 'abortion movie' designed specifically for men." An exceptionally good film, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* seems to me, on the contrary, to draw in women as much as or more than men. Though it powerfully engages with the topic of abortion, its concerns are not confined to that emotive subject: rather than having any male bias, then, the film's achievement is to contextualize abortion with reference in particular to questions of female friendship.

Some contributors to IMDb discussions have claimed that *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* shares an anti-abortion message with Jason Reitman's *Juno* (2008). The claim does not really withstand scrutiny although it makes for an interesting comparison. In *Juno*, a pregnant teenager (Ellen Page) goes to an abortion clinic, but changes her mind after meeting a schoolfriend protesting outside. Juno decides to have her baby and give it up for adoption. Her family and community support her in this choice, and the film shows a barely credible, though touching, solidarity between Juno and the adoptive mother Vanessa (Jennifer Garner). Hardly seeming to give any thought to the matter, Juno hands over her infant almost as blithely as Dede (Christina Ricci) does in *The Opposite of Sex* (1999). In both films, the survival of the child is so central a concern it apparently requires no acknowledgment. The same concern is evident in other recent films, such as David Cronenberg's *Eastern Promises* (2007), in which Anna (Naomi Watts), having lost a child of her own, succeeds in rescuing another infant whom she takes into her home. The underlying idea is strikingly expressed in the eighth episode of Kieślowski's *Decalogue* (1989), a Communist-era work from the period that *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* recollects. A teacher of ethics encourages her class to debate the moral choices to be made by a doctor. In the scenario she outlines, a woman's husband is ill with cancer and she is pregnant by another man. She asks the doctor about her husband's chances of survival; if he lives, she will feel obliged to have an abortion. Presenting the moral dilemmas to her class, the teacher adds: "In order to make your task more difficult, I can tell you that the child is alive and that this, perhaps, is the most important."

Juno omits any representation of distress on the part of the lead character and, near the end, underlines the ethos of nurturing parenthood in a shot of Vanessa cradling the newborn (an image which recalls similar idyllic shots in *The Opposite of Sex*, though the parents there are gay men). *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* not only fails to spare us its characters' distress, but also includes a harrowing and unavoidable image of a tiny aborted fetus, an image utterly incompatible with the parenting shots just described. In a way, the explicitness connects the film with extremist pro-life campaigning materials which aim to appall. Yet while Mungiu's film addresses the act of abortion frontally, confronting the searing physicality of the fetus, it does not in so doing seem to me to insist that the life of the unborn child outstrips other concerns. The focus is in fact chiefly on the young women whose lives are newly damaged by the actions they take; the extent to which they are able to care for themselves or each other is the major moral concern. *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* is, if anything, a pro-choice film because of this concern, but it would be wrong to present it in these partisan terms. To appreciate the achievement of *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, including the way it intersects with abortion debates, it is helpful to consider its emotive force as a work of cinema.

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4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days is a film that, from its opening shots, always seems to encompass more than we actually see on-screen.

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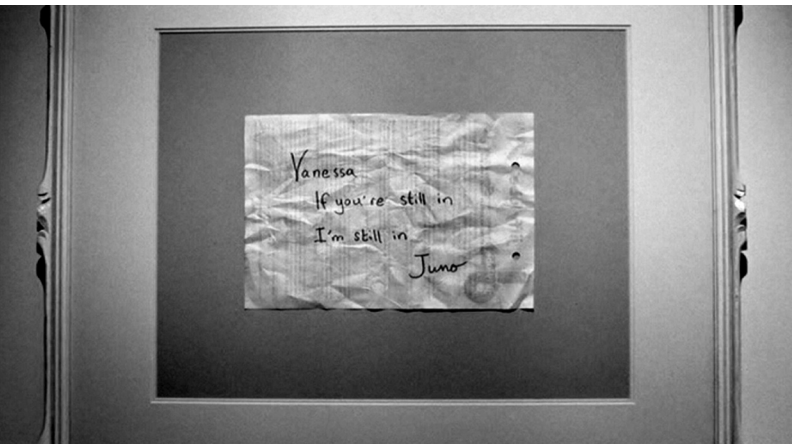
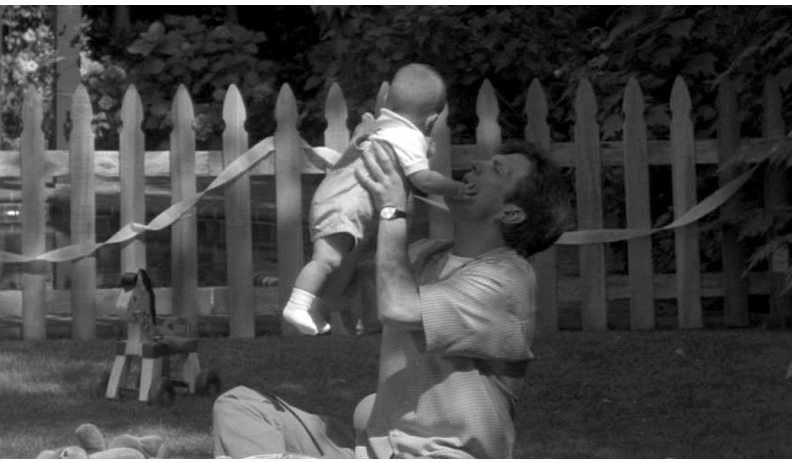




Surrogate parenting

Top: *Juno.* © 2007 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. DVD: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2008. Bottom: *The Opposite of Sex.* © 1998 Rysher Entertainment Inc. DVD: Columbia Tristar Home Video, 1999.

The first shot shows a tank of fish in the center of the frame, its reflective glass and liquid a moving, even amniotic, focus for the image. We only become aware of what is off-screen as a hand reaches into the frame toward an ashtray. The camera pulls back to show Găbiţa (Laura Vasiliu) sitting on her bed smoking. She speaks, though it appears that she is the only figure in the scene at this point. A few moments later we see her addressee, Otilia (Anamaria Marinca), who has been present off-screen, to the right. In these opening minutes, the film unsettles our sense of omniscience several times—there is more beyond the screen and impinging on its narrative than we can first detect—and it undoes our confidence in the possibilities of exchange and reciprocity between the protagonists. The young women speak to each other, and make demands on each other, while the viewer remains uncertain about who is present or to what degree each is responsive to (or indeed responsible for) the other.

4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days begins in the thick of its drama. Găbiţa is already pregnant. She has already taken the decision to have an abortion, and has made initial arrangements to do this with the advice of a friend, Ramona, whom we never encounter in the film. Absented from the drama thus are any details about the circumstances of her pregnancy, the emotions of fear or grief attending the decision to abort, or reflections on her choices. By this stroke, the film unsettles our grasp on the moral issues of its narrative. Finding ourselves immediately in the throes of a story that unfolds with alarming speed and in a brief period of time, we are left to participate closely in the physical and mental ordeals of the two characters without a sure sense of their responsibility or implication.

In the shared dorm room with its antiseptic, unwelcoming furniture, we observe them making preparations. Găbiţa, who will bungle so much in this drama—lying to the abortionist about the amount of time she has been pregnant, refusing to go and meet him in advance, failing to secure a hotel reservation in person, and forgetting the plastic sheet on which she should lie as she waits the abortion procedure to be complete—is seen at the start waxing her legs. This senseless and trivial act is silently recalled in the extended scenes later in the film where we see Găbiţa after the probe has been inserted, lying on the hotel bed with her perfectly smooth legs raised. Her

Women's friendship in institutional spaces

Top: *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days.* © 2007 Mobra Films. DVD: BAC Vidéo (France).

Bottom: *The Dreamlife of Angels.* © 1998 Les Productions Bagheera, France 3 Cinéma, Diaphana, le CRRAV. DVD: France Télévision Distribution (France), 1999.

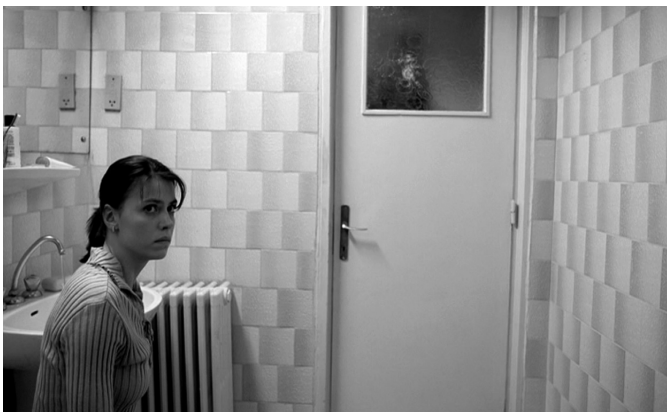
still, archaic posture, and the prosaic setting, recall Paula Rego's images in her various abortion pictures (for example her *Triptych* of 1998). Yet there are differences between Rego's narratives of women aborting and Mungiu's. As Fiona Bradley writes in *Paula Rego* (Tate Publishing, 2002): the painter "makes it clear that what is happening is the intention of each woman, who fully accepts her role as protagonist in the action. Crucially, they are doing this, they are not having it done to them: it is their right and their choice. Many of the women meet the viewer's gaze. Others are turned in on themselves, making it clear that what is happening is no one's business but their own. None of them accepts the role of victim." The same cannot be said of Găbiţa, who displays a strange anomie, an emotional numbness, through much of the film. Rather than taking responsibility for her action, she is demanding, yet impassive, irresponsible, and vulnerable. Stéphane Delorme in *Cahiers du cinéma* (September 2007) describes her as "très antipathique"—very hard to like—and this seems the general view. I do feel sympathy for her myself, even as I observe her inability to assume responsibility for her situation. There is, I think, pathos as well as absurdity in her childlike gestures—she has brought tiny homemade cakes for the abortionist, Bebe (Vlad Ivanov) when what he will demand, in addition to his fee, is sexual possession of her body (and of Otilia's). Găbiţa vainly asks him to forego Otilia and just rape her, confirming her powerlessness. Yet as the film continues, we find that she is able to survive the ordeal in her own way.

Otilia is the resourceful heroine of the film. From the opening sequences, in which she barters for various items Găbiţa needs, through scenes where we witness her negotiations with a hotel receptionist and with Bebe, it is clear that Otilia has the verve and resilience Găbiţa lacks. It seems apt that the film opens in a girls' dormitory and that, following Otilia, it moves through the various lifeless, institutional spaces of dormitory, corridors, and washrooms. Like Erick Zonca, in *The Dreamlife of Angels* (1998), Mungiu treats here a female friendship, an intimate and everyday alliance, both practical and affective, which becomes newly demanding and unknowable in the face of trauma. This friendship, and the spaces which determine its mise-en-scène—the dorm room, the hotel room—imply a series of other possible meager lives, the lives of other girls in hostels, of other girls in factories.

The lives of Găbiţa and Otilia become increasingly entangled. Each is seen to be dependent on the other, yet also alienated from her. Unease about this interdependence becomes overt in the scene during which Bebe commits his sexual assaults. Each woman is shut out from the experience of the other—as the viewer is also. Otilia undresses, and the film leaves her in the bedroom with Bebe, attending instead to Găbiţa's distress and grief in the corridor outside. When Găbiţa goes back in, she goes straight to the bathroom that acts as an airlock, or interstice, between the scene of forced sex and abortion, and the communal spaces of the hotel. Găbiţa runs water to drown the noise of the sex in the adjacent room. It is left unclear how far her acts are self-protective—as she screens herself from the demands she has made on Otilia—or respectful as she refuses to be a witness to the shame and degradation of her friend. What is critical is that the action takes place off-screen. We are obliged to experience it vicariously, through the fear and projection of the protagonist who is outside the bedroom.

There is some illusion of connection between the different spaces and psyches when Otilia enters the bathroom, naked from the waist down, wearing only her grass green sweater. But she pays no attention to Găbiţa and is seen washing out her body, hosing herself clean, absorbed in her own horrified ablutions. Găbiţa slips into the room next door and again the film waits in the bathroom for the sex act to be over. When Găbiţa returns, Otilia looks toward her in the mirror. Găbiţa's weeping is heard in the enclosed space, but she herself is not seen. When we see Otilia reflected in the mirror, looking over at Găbiţa, we do not see whether Găbiţa looks back or responds to her gaze. When they are alone after Bebe has left, again reciprocity is undone: we see only Găbiţa's bared knees in the foreground and Otilia sitting motionless. The moments are drawn out, with no exchange or conversation. When Găbiţa eventually thanks her friend, she herself is missing from the frame: we simply see Otilia in profile, with no response.

Eventually Otilia will say: "I'm just upset that things ended up this way." She leaves Găbiţa with the probe implanted, so that she can go and be with the family of her boyfriend, Adi (Alexandru Potocean). We do not know whether she would always have left Găbiţa or if a new priority given to her own needs arises from the mess that has ensued with Bebe. Whichever may be the case, her departure at this point serves the dramatic and psychological strategies of the film. *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* refuses any direct representa-



Off-screen terrors

4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days. © 2007 Mobra Films. DVD: BAC Vidéo (France).

tion of the loss of the fetus itself—we do not see Găbiţa's experience of the abortion—but, as in the sex scenes, it conjures events through anxiety and projection. After she has left Găbiţa behind, the off-screen hotel room and its possible horrors are clearly never absent from Otilia's mind. At dinner with her boyfriend's parents and friends, she is seen in her anxiety almost trapped among the guests at the table. Through her mounting fears, and her remoteness from the focus of her attention, we must imagine what might be happening to Găbiţa in the hotel room. The rigor of the director here, refusing any cut-away to Găbiţa, is devastating. Otilia tries to keep in contact with Găbiţa by phone from the apartment, but her first attempts to call are thwarted and when she finally gets through, Găbiţa does not answer. These scenes, and the later nighttime street sequences as she makes her way back to the hotel are, on a first viewing, almost too painful to watch. The physical toll on Otilia is marked in the outdoor handheld shots: the urban environment seems to encroach on her psyche. Her heavy breaths give an urgent cadence to the film; the physicality of her fear is underlined as she stops to vomit in the street.

When Otilia finally returns to the hotel, there is by contrast a marked sense of unreality. The sobriety of the shots, and their calm, are in stark opposition to any bloody imagining of what was happening there. Yet fear ensues differently as we view a still figure in the bed. Otilia reaches out to Găbiţa with great tenderness, stroking her hair. Out of the anxiety she has experienced while being absent, her loyalty to her friend has emerged once more. (When she spoke with her boyfriend about abortion, she said that Găbiţa would help her were she in the same situation.) Yet Otilia's affection for the endangered or sleeping Găbiţa is fragile. Finding her friend alive, Otilia asks her: "Why weren't you answering?" Găbiţa leaves this as well unanswered, turning Otilia's attention instead to the act that has been committed.

Where so much of the film has depended on what is not seen, at this point, with sheer shock effect, we have a full view of the fetus that Găbiţa has delivered. The shot shows the dead infant, recognizably around four months, small, yet disquietingly fleshy, its head and a curving arm visible. It has been wrapped in white towels that have soaked up blood and water. It has a tactile, vulnerable presence in this space and Otilia moves to wrap it up and remove it as evidence. Otilia, true to Bebe's gruesome instructions, will take it to a high-rise and throw it down a chute. The thud of the flesh package as it drops to the ground comes as a dull aftershock and reminder of the gravity of the act.

On returning to the hotel, there is a further shock when we find Găbiţa sitting alone in the restaurant downstairs,

Otilia's burden

4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days. © 2007 Mobra Films. DVD: BAC Vidéo (France).

Lost together

4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days. © 2007 Mobra Films.

with only one place laid at the table. Otilia nevertheless sits down and prepares to eat. Găbiţa and Otilia are seen together within the frame, on either side of the table: the composition of the shot, with a cigarette burning, recalls the start of the film. The two women vow they will never talk about what has happened, but even as they do this, the appearance of the meal Găbiţa is served seems to evoke the human flesh discarded. In their silence about the act and their continued immersion in familiar routine there is no space for regret or retrospection. Mungiu sets his abortion drama in the register of the everyday and shows its irresolution with a matter-of-factness that borders on the absurd. Otilia sits at the table in an uneasy truce with her friend while a wedding is celebrated in another room.

The strength of the film comes in its equanimity as it forces us to live through these moments with two young women as they respond to each other's needs and confront each other's limits. In this regard it most closely resembles Cristi Puiu's *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* (2005), in which we observe a nurse's attempts to check her dying patient into a series of Romanian hospitals. While she has at first only a contingent relation to the patient, and no particular affection develops between them, the film shows very aptly the unwilled involvement that arises from the act of physically accompanying another individual. *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* denigrates the healthcare system, its bureaucracy and impoverishment, the callousness of its professionals. Like *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, it also explores the demands and needs of the suffering other, and the emotional constraints there are on the provision of care. Only an intermittence of care is possible and this is so also in the relationship between Găbiţa and Otilia. That intermittent, fragile bond is, rather than the abortion procedure, the main subject of Mungiu's superb film and the source of its compelling, stringent ethical seriousness. At the end, refusing any words to describe their physical ordeal and unbearable loss, unable to speak to each other, the young women remain, sitting together, still each other's closest ally.

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ABSTRACT This essay situates Cristian Mungiu's film, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* in relation to a number of films which deal with abortion. However, the argument is made that this film's chief concern is for problems of intimacy and distress pertaining to the central friendship between two women.

KEYWORDS abortion, female friendship, caregiving in cinema, Mungiu, cinema and ethics

CREDITS *4 luni, 3 saptamâni si 2 zile.* Director, producer, screenplay: Cristian Mungiu. Producer, director of photography: Oleg Mutu. Editor: Dana Bunescu. © 2007 Mobra Films.

LATE OZU, LATE NARUSE

JOAN MELLEN REVISITS CULMINATING FILMS, NOW AVAILABLE ON DVD, OF TWO KEY JAPANESE DIRECTORS

Ozu and Naruse at last have been acknowledged equally as masters of Japanese cinema. Both began at the Shochiku studios, Ozu the favorite, Naruse perennially passed over for film assignments until finally he departed for the company that would become the giant Toho. A rumor circulated that Shiro Kido, who ran Shochiku, finally fired Naruse because he didn't need "another Ozu." Yet film criticism has often cast them as polar opposites with Ozu benign, reconciled in a Zen-like transcendence to life's inequities, and Naruse restless, straining against injustice to the last frame.

Unlike Naruse's, Ozu's films partake of unities, and are well-wrought works of art, as this recent Criterion collection of five late Ozu films makes apparent. (Missing, alas, is Ozu's last film, *An Autumn Afternoon* [1962].) Ozu was an auteur in the conventional sense of that term so that it's impossible to mistake an Ozu film for a work by any other director. A sequence opens, predictably, with at least two shots of the social or natural environment before human beings are permitted into the mise-en-scène. The signature Ozu angle, famously, is low, three feet from the ground, an emblem of the angle of vision of a Japanese seated on the tatami. Ozu is the master of the void, filling each of his films with uninhabited shots while the director focuses on buildings, rooms, trains, and corridors. A typical example is the shot of the empty bench at the railroad station in *The End of Summer* (1961) after Noriko (Yoko Tsukasa) and Teramoto (Akira Takarada) have said their goodbyes.

Ozu's characteristic icons make regular appearances: smokestacks, decrying the hazards of modernization; large clocks, constant reminders of mutability; laundry hanging out a line to denote that life goes on. Ozu's aural icons include mournful train whistles; the defiant foghorns of tugboats; and the non-diegetic ticking of those persistent clocks.

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The music that accompanies the opening of the typical Ozu sequence is light, vulgar almost, lilting, as it carries the message that this too shall pass. Infusions of American folk music are reminders that Japan is not alone. Yet "My Darling Clementine" is transformed into a uniquely Japanese farewell song. "There's No Place Like Home" plays ironically in *Equinox Flower* (1958), where father and daughter wage temporary warfare. Ozu depicts robust group renditions of "Aulde Lang Syne," a reflection of his realistic exactitude. Humor leavens Ozu's shot compositions, as in one shot in *Late Autumn* (1960), set in the entertainment district: there are three signs, one in English, another in hiragana, a third featuring Chinese characters.

Ozu is single-minded in immersing his Japanese audience in the comforts attendant upon the familiar. Deliberately repetitive, he depicts his characters abiding by the amenities that make life in a crowded society endurable. Each restaurant scene includes a waitress apologizing for making her customers wait for their food. These everyday courtesies are the real-life lubricants that allow the Japanese to tolerate life's abundant vicissitudes and disappointments.

Compared to Ozu, Naruse seems sloppy. Only the gloom that suffuses all three films in this BFI collection (DVD region 2) mark them as works by a single director; all are adaptations of the fiction of the great Japanese writer, Fumiko Hayashi. Naruse works as if formal unities would betray his vision, as if the well-ordered plot would add a dishonest sense of comfort to characters for whom there is no respite from suffering. Naruse's films seem to be composed as he goes along, some scenes short, others long.

Late Chrysanthemums (1954), a case in point, is startling in Naruse's abrupt change of style two-thirds of the way through. Without warning, Naruse enlists voiceover narration to relay the thoughts of his main character, O-Kin (Haruko Sugimura). These are followed by a rhythmic use of parallel action as Naruse moves between O-Kin's disillusioning

When a Woman Ascends the Stairs. Courtesy BFI.

evening with her old lover Tabe (Ken Uehara), and scenes of her two fellow ex-geisha O-Tomi (Yuko Mochizuki) and O-Tamae (Chikako Hosokawa) struggling through the same rainy night together elsewhere.

Floating Clouds (1955) unfolds as an accumulation of scenes, like perpetual episodes of harsh weather. Each is demeaning for Yukiko (Hideko Takamine), the main character, until, exhausted by the abuse she suffers at the hands of her lover Tomioka (Masayuki Mori), she expires. (All of Tomioka's women die, from his wife, to his married lover Osei, to Yukiko.) Flashbacks to Yukiko and Tomioka in Indochina during the war are interpolated willy-nilly. (Missing from the BFI set, unfortunately, is Naruse's powerful adaptation of Hayashi's autobiography, *A Wandering Life*. Naruse called his version *The Other Woman* [1962], and it is his finest Hayashi adaptation, the last of six.)

It would seem that Naruse is profoundly different from Ozu. Rejecting the "it can't be helped" philosophy embraced by so many Ozu characters, Naruse seems to feel more deeply the despair of his people. Not for Naruse the quasi-religious foxhole into which Ozu at times seems to vanish.

Late Chrysanthemums offers a searing slice of the lives of three aging former geisha, brought together from separate Hayashi stories. O-Tomi is a washerwoman and sometime gambler. O-Tamae is a maid at a hotel. Only O-Kin, now a real-estate speculator, has discovered how to survive free of the parasitic men who prey on women mercilessly in Naruse's films. The men who attempt to exploit her depart without a solitary yen, but O-kin has grown hard and cynical. She pursues the victims of her usury without respite.

Late Chrysanthemums is framed by an opening sequence where O-Kin settles with her broker (Daisuke Kato) on a deal, and by a closing scene where the two go off to inspect a new parcel of land. Better, Naruse seems to suggest, that O-Kin console herself with money than suffer the fate of Yukiko in *Floating Clouds*, so obsessed by a worthless man that she throws her life away.

Yet Ozu and Naruse have much more in common than is first apparent. Ozu's *Early Spring* (1956) and *Tokyo Twilight* (1957) and Naruse's *Late Chrysanthemums* and *Floating Clouds* are all set at the post-war moment. Ozu and Naruse share the vision that human character is fixed. No moral transformations enter their films. Good people behave decently. Careless, selfish people, and this includes virtually all the men in Naruse, experience no enlightenment, nor are they ever sorry for the suffering they cause, not least Yukiko's brother-in-law in *Floating Clouds*, who raped her and sent her fleeing to Indochina.

Both Ozu and Naruse discover cinematic means of reflecting human travail. At moments of anguish for his characters, Naruse placed the camera diagonal to the action, as in *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* as Keiko (Takamine) stands outside the train that will carry away her lover Fujisaki (again Mori, the quintessential weak Naruse male).

The equivalent in Ozu is his disruption of the geography of the shot by placing the camera suddenly on the other side of the circumference of an imaginary circle, so that with the cut the spectator becomes at once disoriented. An extraordinary example comes after Akiko (Ineko Arima) has an abortion in *Tokyo Twilight*. Akiko is in bed, her head to the left of the frame. Ozu then places his camera across the circumference, so that in the following shot Akiko's head is at frame right. Yet the scene has not changed, and no time has elapsed.

THE WORLD OF THE *SHOMIN-GEKI*

Both Ozu and Naruse explored the post-war moment through the *shomin-geki*, the naturalistic genre depicting the tawdry details of lower-middle-class life. Both directors include characters who blame Japan's defeat in the war for their troubles. In *Floating Clouds*, Tomioka responds bitterly to Yukiko's remark that things in Japan have changed: "What did you expect? We lost the war." O-Kin in *Late Chrysanthemums* echoes this view: "The war changed everything." In Ozu's *Early Spring*, Masako (Chikage Awashima), neglected wife of the protagonist Sugiyama (Chikage Awashima), scornful of his rowdy working-class former war buddies who arrive without notice to spend the night, says "No wonder Japan lost the war!"

Ozu and Naruse both depict hardships that flow from the war, along with incurable illnesses, the deaths of children and of fathers, loneliness, boredom, and meaningless work. The salarymen in *Early Spring* describe their work at the Toa Fire and Brick Company as a literal imprisonment: "We're locked up all day in our jail."

Neither director blames class inequities for their characters' disillusionment. In *Tokyo Twilight*, a working man buys banker Shukichi (Chishu Ryu) a drink. The banker's daughter, Akiko, is dressed throughout the film in a shabby, wrinkled tweed coat and kerchief. Ozu's higher-ups, the golf-playing corporate executives in *Equinox Flower* and *Late Autumn*, are confronted by the same wall of discontent. The small-time capitalist, owner of a sake company, in *The End of Summer* cannot prevent his business from being swallowed up by a conglomerate. Ozu allows him to die in time not to lose his independence.

Both directors depict lower-middle-class people living in such tight quarters that privacy is unthinkable. Indoor toilets

Hard farewells

When a Woman Ascends the Stairs. © 1960 Toho Co. Ltd. DVD: BFI (U.K.).

are rare, running water sporadic and a rare luxury. Dogs bark long into the night. Dirty urchins without occupation run through the mise-en-scène, and people slurp noodles lustily, as if they haven't eaten for years, from O-Tomi in *Late Chrysanthemums*, and Yukiko in *Floating Clouds*, to all the young salarymen in *Early Spring*.

In this Japan there isn't enough food and everyone is hungry. The people are so poor that they cringe at the thought of having children to support. Women choose abortions in both *Tokyo Twilight* and *Floating Clouds*. In *Early Spring*, attempted abortions fail.

Naruse's films seem more gritty. It seems inconceivable that Ozu would have opened a film, as Naruse does *Floating Clouds*, with stock footage of shabby Japanese disembarking after being repatriated at the war's end. But Ozu's films of this period reveal a similar inhospitable environment, conveyed by the thick black smoke in *Early Spring* issuing from the chimneys in the transferred salaryman's remote Mitsuishi exile.

Neither director is a stranger to melodrama. Surprisingly, the most melodramatic of these films is Ozu's *Tokyo Twilight* where a woman's having abandoned her family during the war leads directly to the suicide of her daughter years later. In a psychological disarray worthy of Naruse's women, Akiko, convinced that she was unwanted, uncertain of the identity of her real father, wishing she were never born, flings herself in front of a train.

These late films reveal Ozu and Naruse as more similar than different in their appreciation of the fate of Japanese women. It's Ozu who repeatedly focuses on men returning home and flinging their jackets to the floor for their wives to retrieve and hang up. Male infidelity was the norm and Ozu no less than Naruse observes the pain it causes to women.

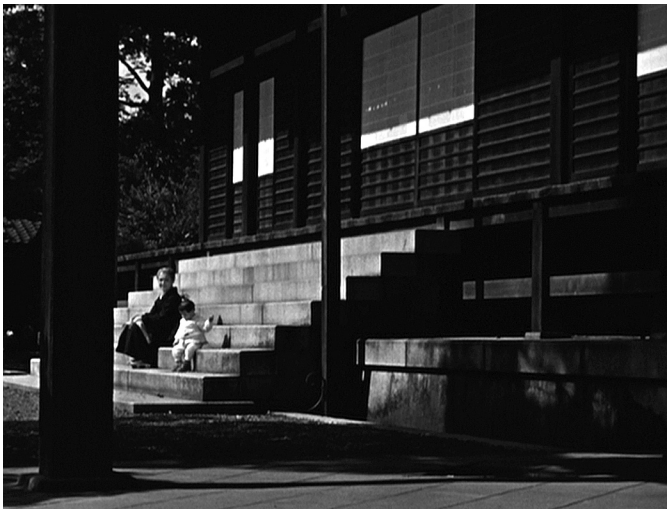
In *Early Spring*, unfaithful Sugiyama complains when dinner is not ready upon his arrival home and wants his wife to make up his bed, as if his disloyalty were of no moment. Masako, who once thought she would die if she didn't marry him, chafes at the inequity, but the alternative, becoming a household servant to a widowed friend, is hardly a desirable option.

"No fun being a wife," remarks Sugiyama's girlfriend "Goldfish" (Keiko Kishi), a view shared by the majority of the women of Ozu's younger generation, and one Naruse would endorse. "Marriage isn't so great" and "It's hard to find a good man" are lines from Ozu's *Equinox Flower*. In *Late Chrysanthemums*, O-Kin says, "All men are vampires," a line we would expect in a Naruse adaptation from Hayashi. Yet these words apply perfectly to the unspeakable student, Kenji (Masami Taura), in Ozu's *Tokyo Twilight*, who tells pregnant Akiko, "I wonder if it's even mine."

The unlucky widows in Ozu, who have been acculturated to consider remarriage "dirty" and "filthy," fare no better than those in Naruse. They are condemned to half a lifetime of loneliness and straitened circumstances. Ozu discovers no respite for those whom life has deprived of "luck" in his many graphic matches and matches-on-action where a character begins a gesture in one shot only to complete it in the next. The treadmill of circumstance is a feature of both directors' work.

WHEN A WOMAN ASCENDS THE STAIRS AND *LATE AUTUMN*

In 1960, Ozu and Naruse both directed films exploring how women might live with their integrity intact in the patriarchal society that continued into the economically revitalized Japan. The films, *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* and *Late Autumn*, sympathize with the "older" woman (she might be no more than forty, and in Ozu is portrayed by the perpetually glowing Setsuko Hara) bereft of male protection. Both reflect on the uneasy compromises urged upon younger women, who are forced to choose between the dangers of independence and the restrictive safety of marriage.



Top, middle: *Tokyo Twilight.* © 1957 Shochiku Co. Ltd. Bottom: *Late Autumn.* © 1960 Shochiku Co. Ltd. DVD: Criterion Eclipse.

Top: *Late Chrysanthemums.* © 1954 Toho Co. Ltd. Middle, bottom: *Floating Clouds.* © 1955 Toho Co. Ltd. DVD: BFI (U.K.).

Naruse's *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* provides a more modern surface than his 1950s films. The powerful widescreen Toho Scope and the razor-edge depth of field, add a more polished look. Yet Naruse's customary ironies remain. Widowed Keiko has become a *mama-san* (head hostess) at a Ginza bar, an option releasing her from the tedium of office work, but far from liberating. Her options are to remarry, a prospect a woman of her generation finds distasteful, as Ozu's widows confirm; to accommodate a "patron" sexually; or to face almost certain financial ruin by opening her own bar, financed by fickle male customers.

The film's title is obviously ironic. While Keiko literally, at the film's opening and at its close, ascends a staircase to her bar, her moral trajectory is ever downward. Fujisaki (Mori again), the one patron she desires, is a stingy banker, who sleeps with her, while never intending to break up his family. A well-meaning (if "fat") patron, played by Daisuke Kato, proposes only to turn out to be a married man with neurotic propensities. Komatsu (Tatsuya Nakadai), the young manager who has remained loyal to Keiko, is disillusioned when she falls from the pedestal of virtue upon which he has placed her. Meanwhile a parasitic, selfish mother and feckless brother bleed Keiko dry.

All that remains to a woman disappointed by men is personal strength, Keiko's acknowledgment, in voiceover, that she "suffered an ordeal as fierce as the north wind" only to emerge determined to be "strong." In her final close-up, her face is fully lit, as Naruse endorses her fortitude. Her dignity resides in taking her disappointments with good grace.

Yet Ozu was no stranger to irony either. A telling example comes in *Tokyo Twilight* where the alcoholic professor, Yasuo Numata (Kinzo Shin) pontificates about the "primitive love" a mother has for her child to a man whose wife has abandoned him and their children. *Late Autumn* offers Setsuko Hara as Akiko, a widow whose daughter Ayako (Yoko Tsukasa) hesitates to marry and leave her mother alone in their shabby apartment. Ayako's motives for delaying marriage go beyond her desire not to abandon her mother. Marriage represents an imprisonment for young women, Ozu shows, one the smartest postpone. Akiko confides her own motive at the close of the film. "I don't want to climb that mountain again," she tells her daughter.

Hara reprises the role in *The End of Summer* where, again named "Akiko," she and Yoko Tsukasa play sisters. A woman over forty faces diminished options, and the widower whom Akiko is urged to marry is so crass and vulgar (he even has a cow embroidered on his shirt pocket, and hides himself so that he can assess her looks before their formal introduction) that Ozu never takes the option seriously. "It's stifling to live with a man who has no character," Akiko says, as if speaking from experience. Ozu shares her view. People may change their behavior, but not their characters.

Having sealed her fate in *Late Autumn*, Akiko is condemned to wait out the dreary decades of middle and old age. Ozu's women, young and old, sooner or later, discover that romantic love is a luxury few can afford. Ozu knows that it is folly to attempt to cling to the old ways in a world so insistent upon changing. The modernity for which the younger generation longs carries its own perils.

NARUSE VS. OZU

There are Naruse images that you won't find in Ozu. In *Late Chrysanthemums*, a begging nun appears. Stingy O-Kin ignores her. Impoverished O-Tamae contributes the little she can. In the background of one of the interminable walking scenes between Tomioka and Yukiko in *Floating Clouds*, walks that lead nowhere, there is a full-scale demonstration of Communists complete with banners flying and a hearty singing of the "Internationale." Naruse suggests that social unrest in the society at large mirrors the travail of his characters.

Such an image, with its implied protest against class (and gender) inequities, would be unthinkable in Ozu. Heavy rain beats down on the landscape in Naruse's films as nature proves itself as formidable an adversary as war and poverty. Fair weather prevails in Ozu's films.

Ozu provides consolations for his characters that Naruse would not permit himself. His people find considerable comfort in being in each other's presence, in being part of a group of "we Japanese," whether on packed commuter trains or on "hikes" (*Early Spring*, *Late Autumn*). In bars, they commiserate with fellow Japanese hitherto unknown to them.

At reunions, Ozu's characters transcend class distinctions, reminiscing together over their shared experiences. In *Early Spring*, former wartime comrades laugh about how in China they were reduced to eating dog-meat sukiyaki. Ozu laughs with them—and at them—but gently.

In *The End of Summer*, Teramoto departs for exile in Sapporo, where his work takes him, against his will, but his departure does not go uncommemorated by his co-workers. The men sit at one side of the table, the women directly across, all behaving identically, dressed almost identically, all singing lustily. Everyone knows the words. Separation is leavened by shared experience. In the signature Ozu shot, the characters look into the camera, sharing the experience with the presumed-to-be-Japanese spectator, as with each other.

Looking on death

The End of Summer. © 1961 Takarazuka Eiga Co. Ltd. DVD: Criterion Eclipse.

Other people, people whom one cannot avoid, like relatives, can be vexing, but, as several Ozu characters do, they can escape to the toilet when necessary. Laughter eases awkward moments. Ozu also provides his characters with small pleasures that help make life bearable: salted sea cucumber or pickled bream, red fish sushi or green tea over rice, all life's blessings.

Ozu also discovers well-meaning patriarchs (and matriarchs) who do desire the happiness of their children (*Tokyo Twilight*, *Equinox Flower*, *The End of Summer*). They are not without error, but they exhibit a capacity for self-sacrifice that Ozu finds ennobling. In *The End of Summer* Akiko includes the explanation that it will be better for her son that she not remarry.

Finally, Ozu is about reconciliation, accommodation to what cannot be changed, what cannot be helped. "Regret won't get us anywhere," the dying patriarch says in *The End of Summer*. Ozu is aware that one person's well-being may condemn another to unhappiness, as the mother and daughter in *Late Autumn* realize. Ozu does not deny that, as a janitor remarks in *Equinox Flower*, "bad things follow the good."

Death is always on Ozu's mind. In the final sequence of his penultimate film, *The End of Summer*, a funeral, Ozu introduces his frequent surrogate, Chishu Ryu, in a cameo role, to speak directly for him. Ryu is a farmer on land adjacent to the crematorium. Crows have gathered, and finally smoke issues from the chimney, indicating the final passage of the Kohayagawa patriarch. "No matter how many die," Ryu says, "new lives will take their place." It's "the cycle of life." This theme is also articulated in Ozu's first shot inhabited by human beings in *Late Autumn*, a long shot of an old man and a child that has no bearing on the plot.

The End of Summer closes on crows perched on gravestones. They are emblems of the black-clothed Kohayagawa

Another goodbye

Early Spring. Courtesy Criterion Collection.

mourners, marching single-file across an elevated bridge to the graveyard. It is the final moment in the dance Ozu has choreographed throughout this film where characters have moved in unison, as if directed by an unseen hand. Ozu reserves for death his final word.

Naruse avoids Ozu's consolations. Moments of laughter, like the one where aging ex-geisha O-Tomi mimics the "Marilyn Monroe walk" near the end of *Late Chrysanthemums*, are rare. The emotional atmosphere of Naruse's films suggests that it would be a betrayal of his characters were he to minimize their anguish.

Hovering close to the surface in the Naruse films is the director's yearning that things be different. "Resignation accumulates like grime on my skin," he said once. It is painful for Naruse that Keiko in *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* has to live out her life as one more "late chrysanthemum" grateful for the opportunity to minister to the whims of selfish men. The director's agony often makes it excruciating to watch a Naruse film. Do not expect an upward trajectory.

For relief, turn to one of these late Ozu films where the tone is elegiac. Ozu pities his characters even as he depicts the best of them as too large of character to feel sorry for themselves. In contrast, Naruse will not relinquish his anger at injustice, at the unfairness against which his women have no defense.

For the harsh bite of reality, return to Naruse.

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ABSTRACT This essay reflects on the shared qualities of the late works of Yasujiro Ozu and Mikio Naruse. Both worked in the *shomin-geki* genre of middle-class life, depicting the often unhappy social conditions, notably among women, in post-war Japan. But while Ozu is tender and pitying, Naruse is agonized and outraged at injustice.

KEYWORDS Mikio Naruse, Yasujiro Ozu, *shomin-geki*, Japanese cinema, women in cinema

DVD DATA *Mikio Naruse* [*Late Chrysanthemums, Floating Clouds, When a Woman Ascends the Stairs*]. Director: Mikio Naruse. © 1954, 1955, 1960 Toho Co. Ltd. Publisher: BFI, 2007. £44.99, 3 discs.

Late Ozu [*Early Spring, Tokyo Twilight, Equinox Flower, Late Autumn, The End of Summer*]. Director: Yasujiro Ozu. © 1956, 1957, 1958, 1960 Shochiku Co. Ltd., 1961 Takarazuka Eiga Co. Ltd. Publisher: Criterion Eclipse, 2007. $69.95, 5 discs.

TENDER IS THE REGARD: *I DON'T WANT TO SLEEP ALONE* AND *STILL LIFE*

YVETTE BÍRÓ COMPARES THE LATEST FICTION FILMS BY TSAI MING-LIANG AND JIA ZHANG-KE

These fascinating and moving recent Chinese films, the first from Taiwan, the second from the Mainland, are the work of two outstanding filmmakers, each representing a different generation. Tsai Ming-liang (*I Don't Want to Sleep Alone*), born in 1957, has a long and highly successful career behind him, with more than a dozen films to his name. Jia Zhang-ke (*Still Life*) is only in his thirties (he was born in 1970), though he has already made four memorable, prize-winning movies.

No wonder that the two directors have differing world views. But there are also strong affinities. Above all, their films are suffused with a subtle generosity and a keen sensitivity in the consideration of human life. There is no romanticism or artful dramatization; indeed, both directors may be described as minimalists. So little adornment is present that there is almost no distance between each filmmaker and his protagonists. And so, in watching these films, we seem actually to breathe with the characters, sharing their emotions and sensations. We enjoy the closeness to them despite the fact that these lives are not happy lives. Such is the precision and delicacy of the filmmakers' observations that, moment by moment, we are led to participate intensely with the characters' every gesture, flowing with them along the rather harsh course of time.

INTERTWINED ON THE BRINK OF EXISTENCE

Tsai's *Hei yan qan* translates literally as "Black Eye Circles." The English title, *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone*, is louder and lighter than it might have been, given that the film is even darker than Tsai's previous work (although its camera compositions are similarly beautiful). The setting is Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, the country of Tsai's birth. He usually describes it as a slow-moving city, a poor relative of Taipei, where he moved at the age of twenty. Spectacular modernity and sudden abundance have not descended upon Kuala Lumpur. Tsai focuses on the hidden aspects of rapid urban modernization in Malaysia: the miserable attics of Bangladeshi refugee squatters, rubbish eaters, where homeless people peacefully vegetate in stifling heat and polluted air. He introduces two men: one, played by Tsai's inescapable collaborator Kang-sheng Lee (who also plays another, comatose character in the film) has been badly beaten by migrant workers. The other, already an "established" squatter, Rawang (Norman Atun), takes pity on the injured man and invites him to share his newly salvaged mattress. This mattress is the only home they have to share. It is rather an awful, heavy bundle, constantly needing to be scrubbed and cleaned, but it is the unique treasure the protagonists possess. It can be moved and transported if necessary, but it always has to be shared. Not out of practical reasons but out of internal need. Because of human solitude, because of the unconsciousness caused by injuries sustained in a street brawl or serious illness, and in front of the nothingness of existence, one cannot sleep alone. Each person needs another, the presence of another human being, a companion, a mate, a fellow sufferer.

Pulled out of a dirty trashcan, the mattress is the entire world. Wretched and torn, clearly condemned to death, the mattress can nonetheless be temporarily revived and made useable with devotion, hard labor, and water stolen from the drainpipe. In Tsai's films, there is never any lack of water. It is to be found in the holes of abandoned, skeletal construction sites and within the rotting ruins of empty buildings. The puddles may even grow to small ponds. Sitting on the "shore" of one such pond, the principal protagonist pretends to be fishing, looking at the mirror of the water as if waiting for something. Then, behind him, his protector Rawang appears, silently keeping the recuperating man company, creating relatedness and closeness. Which, however much Rawang may wish it otherwise, does not interfere with the injured man's attraction to others—a younger and an older woman with whom he copulates. Desire begets desire.

Tsai rightly states that he is not simply an observer. He touches the depth of sensations, fleeting desires, and in-

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Finding refuge

I Don't Want to Sleep Alone. Courtesy Strand Releasing.

stincts but he never does so from a position that is too close to his subjects. Instead he stands back in order, with his exquisite precision, to pay attention to specific details. The lightless, somber images are nevertheless rich, saturated, despite their repetitive, minimalist components. Although the camera always remains distant, it is clear that man and environment are indivisible, identical living vegetation. We have time not only to see, but also to live through the micro-life revealed thanks to the patience of the penetrating, immobile camera composition. The bleak, dreary, and narrow walls, the miserably small windows, or the blatantly barren concrete jungle of the city are the unhomely home of people, where human action is restricted to the most trivial, physical activity.

Tsai understands the language of the body, the naked mother tongue of daily existence best. The normal, simple life functions of our being, the everyday rituals: eating and urinating and washing, teeth-brushing and masturbating—devouring and relieving oneself, the "cries and whispers" of hurried sexual intercourse. This is the common, natural timetable of daily life: waiting silently, then feeding, "downloading" . . . and starting again; doing what has to be done, whatever the body requires, for as long as it is possible, before it is necessary to move again. The solitude of heavy dreams cannot be soothed even with a pillow, the attacks of mosquitoes cannot be avoided even with a net. It is necessary to move, again and again, to a new "dog hole." But when the stifling smoke, originating from god knows where, slowly invades the whole of the space where our characters exist, there is no more room to escape to. The empty stairwell leads to a void, to nowhere. Polluted water is streaming everywhere. Even a brutal copulation does not bring satisfaction. The effect is as much suffocation as relief. Eventually, there is nothing left but the mattress, where the two men and the frail café waitress (Shiang-chyi chen) half-consciously meet, to swim together toward an unknown end.

TOGETHERNESS IN *I DON'T WANT TO SLEEP ALONE*

© 2006 Soudaine Compagnie, Homegreen Films. DVD: Axiom Films (U.K.).

I Don't Want to Sleep Alone is almost devoid of music. At the very beginning we hear on the radio some blaring parts of the *Magic Flute* (the film was commissioned as part of a 2006 Vienna Film Festival tribute to Mozart) and at the end a very sentimental evergreen French song about the beauty of love. Both of these interludes are obviously bitingly ironic, but scowling has a regular part to play in Tsai's work. That is not to say that he is an artist who accuses or complains. Certainly he does not propose social criticism. In his vision, according to his own creed, the patience and wisdom of Zen comes to the fore. Corporeal existence can be absurd and painful, virulent, but beyond all that it surges, though the waters may be rapid or calm, evil or indifferent. The mattress of *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* is like a raft or a vessel for the journey.

Life is not graceful or merciless; life constantly offers new challenges and the task is to respond to them. In the story there is compassion, desire, and care. The forsaken and battered man is helped. But this is not an act of moral goodness. The assistance enacts a primary instinct. The injured and thirsty man should have water to drink, food to eat, room to sleep. The stronger survive, the weaker do not. But there is still, the film insists, interaction, even if only in its most elementary form, the harmony of plant life. Tsai says in an interview in *Tsai Ming-liang* (Editions Dis Voir, 1999): "I always look at my film protagonists as plants who suffer from the lack of water, to the last stage when they fade away, die from dryness, from being deprived from water. Water means love for me, and they suffer from the insufficiency and need of it. What I would like to make perceptible is maybe symbolic, but this is the basic desire of man for love . . ."

There are many other actions and disturbances in *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone*: running among speeding cars along hideous yellowish highways; finding savage sex in the darkness of back-alleys, next to some noisy iron wall; falling asleep and waking up, enjoying cheap neon toys sold by street vendors. These are maybe poor incidents of life but there is no point in protesting against them, and Tsai's characters do not do so. At the end, three thrown-about souls come together in the stream of life. Then they float away, gliding smoothly on tender waves. The flooding, dirty water is at once real, yet it is also poetic. The mattress and its "tenants," swaying on the water, are part of the stream. Man and nature are made out of the same stuff, living side by side, interrelated.

With his ending, Tsai heightens the tone and mood of his film. The gliding mattress, with the embracing three bodies, like an emblematic figure, alludes to their common destiny, to the finally achieved encounter, to peace. In this blissfully calm, silky, timeless moment, it suggests a sublime arrival. The last images are not, however, an "epilogue," divorced from the rest of the film. Throughout the whole story, the palpable ambience of ordinary life bears the touch of a poetic aura. The language of the filmmaker truly addresses us like the words of a poet.

WHAT KIND OF STILL LIFE?

Still Life, which won the Golden Bear at the 2006 Venice Film Festival, is a disarmingly simple story, set in the heart of the greatest construction enterprise in contemporary China, the creation of an enormous dam on the Yangtze. Of course, the building of a dam is a monumental effort, but how could anyone have imagined that the sudden flooding of the historical Three Gorges river junction would not affect the lives of the indigenous people? It destroyed their houses, families, and all the normal living conditions, and this drastic destruction of lives is no less substantial than the spectacular building of the dam. Thousands of people are forced to set off on an uncertain journey, families are dispersed, losing one another. Chaos reigns and tragedies inevitably accumulate. Each person's destiny demonstrates the disintegration of a once-existing community and the compulsion to start all over again, doing whatever is necessary to survive. The confusion is immeasurable.

Still Life follows two parallel stories in this tempestuous world. First, a middle-aged miner, Han Sanming (played by the director's uncle of the same name) arrives from the distant south. For sixteen years he has searched for his wife and daughter. He has nothing but a wretched bag and a crumpled slip of paper with an address, but neither the street nor the neighbors can be found. Second, there is a woman, Shen Hong (Tao Zhao), a nurse who wants to find her husband who has disappeared. The goals are clear and simple, just like the stages of the "grand plan" for the construction. The stories are interrelated, and only restrained simplicity and precision could be appropriate to the seriousness of the director's ambition.

With great sensitivity, Jia tells the story both of these two characters and of their huge environment. The film recurringly shows scenes of the demolition work that has ruined existing settlements. The half-naked workers sweat and drudge and hammer, adding to the vast quantity of rubble. Every night they return to their miserable lodgings to eat a plate of the same plain noodles before they huddle together to sleep. This is still life, reduced to identical repetition and the minimum conditions of subsistence.

The story is broken up into four parts: "Cigarettes," "Liquor," "Tea," and "Toffee." The titles suggest that these modest daily pleasures are significant. Human pains and joys are no less important than the construction of the dam. The two searches and the drama of ordinary occurrences are not

CONSTRUCTION AND DEMOLITION IN *STILL LIFE*

© 2006 Xstream Pictures Limited. DVD: MK2 (France).

dwarfed by the dam-building. It could be said that *Still Life* displays a documentary style, but it wouldn't do justice to the sharp and poignant compositions and the patient, revealing HD camera movements, with which the director is able to create a texture that is both trivial and saturated with significance. The performance of the nonprofessional actors is captivating, and in this apparently merely descriptive film, we constantly experience the characters' emotions and passions. The humble gifts of cigarettes, alcohol, and tea are indicative of the role still played by desires and dreams, no matter how scanty, in a confined world divested of pleasure.

Some forty or more years ago, Russian and Eastern European experiments in the art of (social-)realist presentation were accompanied by excited discussions, feverish denial, and schematic preaching. Can one depict respectable and strenuous work, with its mechanisms and "grandeur," in an emotionally convincing way? Won't it be empty propaganda, mere clichés, with the false pathos of overused official slogans? (As they became!)

The impact of a work, however, never depends on the subject matter. The value of a movie always stems from a particular way of looking or unusual point of view, a personal interpretation about human characters, avoiding the predictable clichés. *Still Life* illustrates Jia's keen perception and ability to discern. The "music" of his film carries us slowly along with a particular intensity as we become immersed in the people's solitude, sorrow, and mute discipline.

The stocky and determined miner does find his wife. She says nothing but is willing to return to him, but can do so only if a debt of 30,000 yen is paid off, a year's salary and further life-threatening work. The nurse also succeeds in her quest, finding her husband, only to announce to him her decision that she wants to divorce. In each case, the end of the search is ironic and melancholy, but we are aware that the characters' stubborn persistence reveals their inner force, which resides in modest, sustained actions as much as grand or vigorous ones.

Additional to the narratives in *Still Life*, there is an opposite rhythm continuing in a constant feverish motion against the ongoing events, an episodic account of the "freedom" and "options" that are newly to be found in the context of the uncontrolled marketeering. People in the film embark on exciting business ventures: the bleached-haired driver of a motorcycle taxi, for example, takes advantage of indigent workers who are ignorant of the locale. The landlord barters with his lodgers while he waits for the demolition of his so-called hotel. A street clown tricks newcomers; rust-eaten boats come and go on the river, seeming to devour men and women with their miserable bundles of possessions. But despite this, people behave calmly and they display a surprising patience. In all the clamor and the confusing, bustling movements, life swarms on, its enormous throng fluctuating and flowing along like the river, without any tantrums.

Still Life's story is manifold and ramifying, but Jia uses the simplest resources of digital video to tell it. Using handheld cameras enabled the filmmakers to be completely mobile and so to get close to the actors, and the HD images emphasize the equal importance of background and foreground. The secret of this economical yet rich film emerges in its ability to render space and time in a palpable way. Space in the shadow of the compelling sight of the monumentality of nature and human labor; time in the light of evocative remembrance. Each character has a life story which compels them to move and act. Indeed, the significance of the historical transformation comes to life in the conjunction of the detailed individual destinies and the grand dimensions of the landscape: the expanse of the water and the far-looming mountains.

Both destruction and creation exist simultaneously in this exceptional moment of time. The dizzying balance or, more precisely, lack of balance between different scales of existence widens almost to the infinite in Jia's unique adventure. It could be claimed that the film apprehends an unfathomable transition, on the unknown threshold of the "not yet" and "already not." This fluency of movement is deeply ambivalent: it is to a degree heartwarming, bringing to the fore the sense of human energy, and conversely the growth of the construction is gigantic but emotionless. The way Jia fuses what is vanishing and what is enduring powerfully is terrifying. Time is at work, vehemently, in a fiercer way than it is possible for those subject to it to understand. We are moved by the perseverance of the characters at the same time as we are forced to register the price of an impetuous pace, the painful and elegiac experience of an unavoidable and merciless revolution.

Still Life finishes with a beautiful and unexpected scene. Our hero, having decided to go back home in order to earn the required money, stops for a moment to observe a perilous "god-tempting" spectacle. A man walks on a tight cord stretched between two high-rise buildings. Before Han's eyes, a frail rope-walker balances skillfully, always moving forwards, as in a dream, and we don't know whether or not he'll ever arrive at the end. The spine-chilling image is not resolved . . . and, hoping for the best, we leave them like this. It is a poetic coda, different in texture from what has preceded it, which therefore encourages us to set the unpretentious story in a larger context.

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Silent flow, manifest simplicity, attention turned to the "insulted and humiliated": these are the ties of kinship between *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* and *Still Life*. But there

Devastation in HD

Still Life. Courtesy BFI.

are discrepancies also. Tsai is an adherent to Zen philosophy and he has openly discussed his world view. This wisdom is responsible in his work for a mature, all-embracing vision of the human world as vital and moving like nature. I do not think Jia would concur in this view. Though his work is also quiet and often serene, it discloses a harsher view of social realities. He wishes, as he said in an interview for *Positif* (May 2007), "to move inside the people's interior world and reveal in a credible way the 'imminent catastrophe' which undermines the reality of today."

Jia is therefore more socially oriented than Tsai. His new documentary film, *Useless* (2007), confirms this sensibility in relation to the uneven changes to life in contemporary China. The subject is tailoring, both an ancient craft and a huge industry now, and we see its different permutations: mass production, artisanal work in a studio, modest mending in a dilapidated mining village. The camera moves gently, almost with the movement of a caress. The effect is warm and human, without animosity. As it is expressed again in *Useless*, Jia Zhang-ke's tender, lyrical, contemplative attitude to the puzzling and troubling experience of our explosive, throbbing universe is fundamentally not so far from that of Tsai Ming-liang.

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ABSTRACT This essay compares Jia Zhang-ke's *Still Life* (set at the site of the construction of the Three Gorges Dam) and Tsai Ming-liang's *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* (set among penniless worker in Kuala Lumpur), finding aesthetic similarities that are offset by contrasting sensibilities, Tsai practicing a certain Zen resignation, Jia more socially engaged.

KEYWORDS Jia Zhang-ke, Tsai Ming-liang, Chinese cinema, high-definition aesthetics, minimalism

CREDITS *Hei yan quan.* Director, screenplay: Tsai Ming-liang. Producers: Bruno Pésery, Vincent Wang. Director of photography: Liao Pen-jung. Editor: Chen Sheng-Chang. ©2006 Soudaine Compagnie, Homegreen Films.

Sanxia haoren. Director, screenplay: Jia Zhang-ke. Producers: Xu Pengle, Wang Tianyun, Zhu Jiong. Editor: Kong Jinlei. ©2006 Xstream Pictures Limited.

PLACES AND OTHER FICTIONS: FILM CULTURE IN TOKYO

CHRIS FUJIWARA ON THE "DISCONTINUOUS AND PARADOXICAL" PRESENCE OF FILM IN THE JAPANESE CAPITAL

It's Sylvia Bataille season all across Tokyo. A black-and-white image of the actress on her famous swing in Jean Renoir's *Partie de campagne* (1936)—her face staring up at an angle at the sun, broad smile, white dress, and flowered hat—adorns trains and train stations. The future Madame Lacan stares up from her swing toward the sun, we stare up at her, endlessly and from everywhere in the city ("in the city of Sylvia," as José Luis Guerín said, though of a different city). Concurrent Renoir *père et fils* retrospectives are under way in Tokyo, and Bataille shares her poster with a color image of Auguste Renoir's *La Danse à la campagne*.

Admittedly this tribute to an actress whose film career ended by 1950 is less the proof of a mass cinephilia than the expression of a love of France that all sane nations share but which takes on a special tone in Japan, where the national self-image depends so much on the separation between the nation and the world, a separation that is frank in its exoticism and its overestimation of the west. Still, Tokyo is a city where the cinema lives, though its life is discontinuous and paradoxical.

One morning at Shimo Takaido in the western Setagaya ward, not far from my apartment, the canned, piped-out street music that gives many Japanese neighborhoods their soundtracks is Bronislau Kaper's "Invitation," the theme of George Cukor's *A Life of Her Own* (1950). One afternoon in Ikebukuro, the music piped over a gaudy Romansu-dori ("Romance Street") of salarymen's amusements is Ennio Morricone's theme for Sergio Sollima's *Città violenta* (1970). Was this a hit in Japan when it came out? Does a hipster program the Romansu-dori music machine? One more thing for a bewildered expatriate to note down and forget to ask a native about.

Donald Richie writes: "Japanese cities often feel like the back lots of movie studios. The various sets, all of them quite large and seemingly permanent, are constructed, used and left standing."[1] These backlots, though they enhance the cinematic quality of Tokyo, get used all too sparingly in films. A disproportionate number of Japanese films seem to be set outside Tokyo or filmed mainly indoors. Filmmaking is not as omnipresent and visible in Tokyo as it is in New York; it's more discreet. Arranging to stop traffic or close down a street for filming is not, it seems, the simple matter it is in the U.S., where every city block and every small town is or aspires to be routinely filmed.

In Makino Masahiro's final film, the period yakuza drama *Cherry Blossom Fire Gang* (*Fuji Junko intai kinen eiga: Kanto hizakura ikka*, 1972), Tokyo is filmed entirely on a backlot. In three shots, a Meiji-era trolley goes by. The compactness of the exterior interiors or interior exteriors, the strangely vacant atmosphere that emanates from Makino's 10 p.m.-blue starless sky, and the pale-yellow rectangles of light popping from the background building fronts speak somehow of the unreal place that Tokyo still is.

Japan's National Film Center, located in Kyobashi near Ginza, is in the middle of a huge centenary tribute to Makino, whose directing career lasted from 1926 to 1972. So far the retrospective has taken up two printed calendars' worth of screenings, three times a day, six days a week. For an afternoon showing of *Cherry Blossom Fire Gang*, the large theater at first seems packed, but as one walks down the aisle, it becomes clear that for every occupied seat there is an empty one beside it. Everyone has come alone. As usual at the Film Center, the audience consists mainly of men in their sixties or older. Maybe many of them saw this film on its first release thirty-six years ago. Many of them could have seen *Tokyo Story* (*Tokyo monogatari*, 1953) on its first release.

It's pleasing to see that in *Cherry Blossom Fire Gang*, the director still adheres to a principle of his 1936 *Takadanobaba Duel* (*Ketto Takadanobaba*): dole out physical action sparingly and make the audience want it more and more, then deliver it with a splash and vigor beyond what they hoped for. The final shot of *Cherry Blossom Fire Gang*—the heroine bowing to the camera in the middle of a crowd that parts for

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Elegiac yakuza

Cherry Blossom Fire Gang. © 1972 Toei Co. DVD: Toei Video Co. (Japan)

her, and saying "I am in your debt" ("osewa ni narimashita")—is explicitly a farewell to the audience from star Fuji Junko (as whose final film this was announced, in the very title); it's also a farewell from the director, as clear a one as could be desired, and, again, beyond expectation.

What are the expectations of the audience at the Film Center in 2008? I don't know. Perhaps the film answers them. When Tsuruta Koji dies, I imagine I detect a few sniffles. There is no mistaking the pleasure that greets the extended climactic combat. At the end, as the camera cranes up to bid farewell to the heroine, and, by implication, the cinema itself bids farewell, there is scattered but vigorous applause. Some have been moved. I would like to applaud too. It is not a last hurrah, it is the gathering of a theaterful of strangers whom the last hurrah passed by, and who have come late to listen for its echoes.

And when these people are gone . . . ?

That is the big question, all over the world. It's not just screens that are disappearing, driven out of business by multiplexes and audience apathy. People are disappearing. (As I write this, the news comes out that Yamanaka Kaku, believed to have been the oldest living Japanese, died at 113. What films had she seen?) As for the type of cinema that *Cherry Blossom Fire Gang* represents, a popular cinema that communicates directly and continuously with its audience, that's been gone for decades.

Film culture is marginal the world over. People don't go to the movies much. In Tokyo, it's rather expensive: tickets commonly cost as much as 1800 yen (currently about $18). On Wednesdays, women get a bargain: 1000 yen. No one I talk to believes that Japanese film culture is healthy. The litany is the same as in other parts of the world. Audiences have become fragmented and as specialized as academics. Film criticism has almost ceased to exist. "At this beginning of the 21st century, the profession of film critic is quasi-fictional," writes Hasumi Shigehiko, who was the charismatic central figure in the most recent flourishing of film criticism in Japan, a golden age that appears to have ended in the 1990s.[2] One can point to online magazines such as flowerwild (www.flowerwild.net), a few cinephile blogs, and occasional print publications such as the fat special issue on Jean Renoir recently published by culture magazine *Eureka*. But, in general, serious film criticism has few places to publish, few readers, and little influence, while mainstream newspaper and magazine film reviewers are impotent and irrelevant.

Japanese cinema is in weak shape. Though hundreds of feature films are made each year, their theatrical life (if they get any) is often limited to one or two weeks of lighting up the inside of a near-empty theater at 10.30 in the morning. A domestic independent film is a relative success if it plays in more than two theaters and stays in at least one of them for a month. The second film by Iguchi Nami, *Don't Laugh at My*

THE TOKYO OF NARUSE AND OZU

Left column: *Ginza Cosmetics*. © 1951 Shintoho Motion Picture Co. Right column: *An Inn in Tokyo*. © 1935 Shochiku Co.

Romance (*Hito no sekusu ni warau na*, 2007), is doing better than that, partly because it stars some popular actors and is based on a well-known novel. Whether these assets, or Iguchi's delicate style and dry humor (already striking in her first film, 2004's *The Cat Leaves Home* [*Inu neko*]), can translate into foreign sales is uncertain. Japanese films are staples at international festivals and sometimes win prestigious awards (Kawase Naomi's *The Mourning Forest* [*Mogari no mori*] took the Grand Prix at Cannes in 2007), but few Japanese films have any commercial existence outside Japan.

Some of the recent Japanese films I see suggest that a national independent art-film style has established itself: highly polished, easy to look at and listen to, but a little boring unless one is powerfully engaged by the theme or the actors (the exact same could be said of Japanese porn). Ichiyama Shozo, producer with Office Kitano and program director of Tokyo FILMeX (an outstanding and very selective international film festival held in November), tells me: "Usually Japanese films are made in a very small world. They're usually about young people; there are not strong social elements." This is why international festivals are more likely to award films from China or Iran. Ichiyama worries about the prevalence of a commercial-TV aesthetic (Japanese films usually must get TV sales to make money). On the other hand, many of the submissions to the Pia Film Festival (dedicated to discovering new filmmakers) seem to reflect the absence of aesthetic choice. According to Araki Keiko, director of the festival, "Maybe young people are making films to cure themselves. They are not thinking about film, they are thinking about themselves. Maybe this is why their films are terrible."

If these new filmmakers don't see enough films, it's not because they don't have the chance. Numerous small independent theaters offer venues for international arthouse cinema, for which Tokyo must be, after Paris, the second city in the world. Such films as Manoel de Oliveira's *Belle Toujours* (2006) start out in Shibuya or Shinjuku and can do well enough there to earn a prolonged life in second-run theaters farther out. Jia Zhang-ke's *Still Life* (2006) recently finished a successful Tokyo run. As Hasumi points out, Tokyo is the only city in the world where Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988/98) received a regular commercial release. Perhaps it's thanks to Hasumi (a scholar of French literature who studied in Paris during the glory days of the Nouvelle Vague), Horikoshi Kenzo of Shibuya's Eurospace (one of the most vigorous and longest-lived Tokyo arthouses and also a distributor and producer of films), and some others that films by Jean Eustache and Philippe Garrel can be rented at Tsutaya (Tokyo's largest chain DVD-rental store) and that the word "cinephile" has entered the Japanese language with its "i"s pronounced as they are in French.

The opening of a major Jacques Rivette retrospective takes place at Eurospace on a Saturday afternoon. Bulle Ogier and Pascal Bonitzer are visiting Tokyo, and a full house is present to hang on Ogier's words at the "talk show" before the screening of *L'amour fou* (1969). Her interlocutor is Nakahara Masaya, noise musician (Violent Onsen Geisha), prizewinning fiction writer, film critic, actor, and musician for Aoyama Shinji (*Eli Eli Lema Sabachtani?*[*Eri Eri rema sabakutani*, 2005]). Effusing inadequacy, almost obstreperous in self-effacement, Nakahara acts starstruck in Ogier's presence. He brandishes his cherished Bulle Ogier seven-inch picture sleeve and shows her the Japanese DVD of Barbet Schroeder's *La vallée* (1972). Ogier is uncertain whether or not he is offering it to her as a gift and, if so, whether she should accept it: "after all, I know the film." She has to call Nakahara to order to change the subject to Rivette. The audience adores her.

The next day, Ogier and the retrospective move to the Institut Franco-Japonais in Iidabashi for the screening of *Le Pont du Nord* (1981)—another full house. Under program director Sakamoto Abi, the Institut has become one of the most important venues for foreign films—not just French films. Recently, as part of a series on films set in Paris, it offered what may be the ultimate cinephile event: a screening of a 35mm print of Vincente Minnelli's *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1962) with French subtitles. On a Sunday morning, attendance for the Minnelli was sparse, though probably no sparser than it would have been on the same day in Paris or New York.

Twenty or thirty years ago more people would have been there. The vibrant ciné-club movement that Tokyo enjoyed during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s has largely vanished, its supporters having succumbed to the pressures of jobs and families and the convenience of DVDs. A lonely upholder of the tradition is the Athénée Français Cultural Center near Suidobashi, of which Matsumoto Masamichi has been director since 1979. A typical season at the Athénée Français might include complete retrospectives of Straub-Huillet or Pedro Costa, a Dreyer series, a program of new Malaysian cinema, and assorted items such as Sidney Hayers's *Payroll* (1961), Amando de Ossorio's *Night of the Sorcerors* (*La Noche de los brujos*, 1973), and an IB Technicolor print of Fritz Lang's *Rancho Notorious* (1952). Undoubtedly it's one of the best film programs in the world.

On 22 December 2006, for the centenary of Jacques Becker's birth, the Athénee Français hosted a symposium on

Tranquil Tokyo

Café Lumière. © 2003 Shochiku Co. DVD: Shochiku Home Video Co. (Japan)

Becker, organized by Hasumi. The packed house, after sitting appreciatively through an unsubtitled print of *The Adventures of Arsène Lupin* (*Les aventures d'Arsène Lupin*, 1957), stayed for two hours of talk (by Hasumi, directors Jean-Pierre Limosin and Aoyama Shinji, and me) on a director largely unknown in Japan. The event testified to Hasumi's ability to rally Tokyo's cinephiles.

Hasumi's classes at Rikkyo University and Tokyo University (whose president he became) are legendary. One of his students, National Film Center curator Okada Hidenori, tells me that Hasumi insisted that students, in thinking about a film, consider only what's in the frame and on the soundtrack and exclude whatever could be learned only outside the film. I heard the same thing from film scholar Hirano Kyoko a few months ago. By getting them to assume the position of a filmmaker in thinking about how films were constructed, Hasumi gave his students the desire to make films—a desire that was realized by several of them, including a significant proportion of the tiny number of Japanese directors who have achieved international reputations since the 1970s: Kurosawa Kiyoshi, Aoyama Shinji, Suo Masayuki, and Manda Kunitoshi among them. That generation of filmmakers was the last in Japan to start making films by working in eight-millimeter. When occasional retrospectives at the Athénée Français or at the Image Forum or Uplink in Shibuya celebrate the Japanese eight-millimeter tradition, it's like the display of the relics of a lost civilization.

The filmic records of Tokyo don't add up, any more than do the parts of the city itself. "An ahistorical city," Hasumi calls it. "No particular tradition was formed there: it was incessantly demolished and rebuilt. Its identity is ambiguous, almost fictional."[3] Visiting Tokyo in 1874, W. E. Griffis noted "the vast extent of open space as well as the lowness and perishable material of which the houses are built."[4] In Ozu's *An Inn in Tokyo* (*Tokyo no yado*, 1935), the industrial zone through which the homeless characters move resembles a desert where giant tanks and low shacks are plunked down beneath a sky filled with crisscrossing telephone lines. A barely more resident-friendly variation on this kind of quasi-open space is the neighborhood where the title character lives in *The Only Son* (*Hitori musuko*, 1936). These are places that don't yet exist—limbo.

The ambiguous identity of which Hasumi writes finds rich expression in the precious documents of their times provided by such Naruse films as *Three Sisters with Maiden Hearts* (*Otome gokoro sannin shimai*, 1935), *Ginza Cosmetics* (*Ginza gesho*, 1951), *Approach of Autumn* (*Aki tachinu*, 1960). These films have much to do with transience, with the kinds of everyday experiences and encounters whose essence lies in their unremarkableness, their fleetingness, their con-

stantly being taken away from us even as we live them. This instability is in the nature of Tokyo—a city built *not* to last.

Walking through a Japanese city, one regrets the loss of so much history, so much art, so much beauty. But not the loss of the square, stately, smart commercial buildings that represent Ginza in Naruse's pre-war films, and which have been replaced with other buildings not dissimilar in style, scale, or indifference to a people's strivings and sufferings. The Ginza of today is, for me, the same as Naruse's Ginza (though the people are different). And in the Setagaya of today I can still retrieve the atmosphere of Naruse's Setagaya in his post-war films, a place of hope where people go to escape from urban dehumanization, as Takamine Hideko does in *Lightning* (*Inazuma*, 1952). In *Sudden Rain* (*Shu-u*, 1956), Sano Shuji and Hara Setsuko live in Umegaoka, a ten-minute walk from my apartment. Naruse himself lived, for part of his life anyway, in Seijo, a few kilometers farther west and not far from the studios of his employer, Toho.

Of the ruined, scrambling, enterprising early post-war Tokyo that Naruse recreated in *Floating Clouds* (*Ukigumo*, 1955), almost nothing is left. Perhaps hints of it remain in Golden Gai, a Shinjuku district where narrow walkways crisscross a mid-sized city block crammed with small buildings, each housing two or three bars stacked on top of each other. Here is where cinephile Kawai Tomoyo runs the famous La Jetée (named in tribute to Chris Marker, whose *Sans Soleil* [1983] celebrates Tokyo), a mecca for visiting filmmakers and Francophones. The cliché about how much the Japanese can do with a small space is taken to an extreme in the Golden Gai; it's also expressed with eerie exactness and a different atmosphere in Ozu's post-war films, with their recurrent shots of small alleyways lined with bars—a dreary but comfortable miniature paradise of isolated islands where people go to escape from their workplaces and homes.

The film heritage of Japan, to the extent it has survived destruction, remains available in Tokyo, where a number of repertory-film houses—Shin Bungeiza in Ikebukuro, Cinema Artone in Shimo Kitazawa, Laputa in Asagaya, Cinemavera in Shibuya—devote all or much of their programming to older Japanese films. In recent years, the National Film Center devoted centenary retrospectives to Ozu, Naruse, Mizoguchi, and others. The Ozu observations in 2003 also included a two-day symposium that was televised on national television channel NHK and the world premiere of Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Café Lumière* (*Kohi jiko*), which Shochiku produced as a tribute to its greatest director.

Hou shot *Café Lumière* on Tokyo trains without permission, bypassing the bureaucratic restrictions that stifle filmmakers and limit how much reality can reach Japanese screens. The image of Tokyo in Hou's film is overwhelmingly beautiful and peaceful. Hou shows Tokyo as a place to live, drink coffee, eat food, and be with other people. There is none of the anxiety about historical lateness that haunts Wim Wenders in *Tokyo-ga* (1985), and none of the cultural paranoia that Sofia Coppola makes so chic in *Lost in Translation* (2003), but instead a calm acceptance of place, rhythm, historical time.

In a stranger's eyes

Sans Soleil. © 1982 Argos-Films. DVD: Arte Vidéo (France).

A kindred film to *Sans soleil* (the other great visitor's film on Tokyo), *Café Lumière* is not explicitly about film culture, but it offers a profound message about culture in general. It accepts the inevitable loss of parts of the past because it knows how to retain the parts that can be saved. It provides a model for both filmmaking and film viewing as immersions within the fleetingness of experience. It deals with the conquest of social isolation through the acknowledgment of shared aesthetic projects and the formation of communities of outsiders. It tells us that we all must, and do, make culture, including the culture of the past, and advises us to go about this task with patience and without dread.

1. *Tokyo: A View of the City* (London, Reaktion Books: 1999), p. 48.
2. "Lettre de Tokyo," *Trafic* 58 (summer 2006): 132.
3. "Tokyo," *La ville au cinéma*, ed. Thierry Jousse and Thierry Paquot (Paris: Editions Cahiers du cinéma, 2005), p. 615.
4. Edward Seidensticker, *Low City, High City: Tokyo from Edo to the Earthquake: How the Shogun's Ancient Capital Became a Great Modern City, 1867–1923* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 32–33.

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ABSTRACT This essay explores places of cinematic interest in Tokyo, including areas of the city filmed by notable directors, and screening/discussion venues such as the National Film Center, Eurospace, and the Institut Franco-Japonais.

KEYWORDS Tokyo, Japanese cinema, Hasumi Shigehiko, Naruse, Ozu

FILMS OF THE YEAR, 2007

JAMES NAREMORE MAKES HIS SELECTION OF THE YEAR'S BEST U.S. RELEASES (INCLUDING ONE TV SHOW)

In its winter 1961–62 issue, *Film Quarterly* invited five eminent figures—Pauline Kael, Stanley Kauffmann, Gavin Lambert, Dwight Macdonald, and Jonas Mekas—to comment on "Films of the Year," and in the next several issues the same group provided a feature entitled "Films of the Quarter." The five were writing at a significant moment. The New Wave had recently hit the shores of San Francisco and a seismic shift was rumbling beneath U.S. culture in general. Hollywood was losing some of its popularity, not only among sophisticated urban audiences, who were infatuated with European art cinema, but also among ostensibly ordinary viewers in small towns, who had turned en masse toward what Federal Communications Commission Chairman Newton Minow, in a much-publicized speech of 1961, called the "vast wasteland" of network television. Of all the films shown in the U.S. during that year, the ones that received the most praise from *Film Quarterly*'s quintet of judges were foreign productions. By far the favorite was Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura*, with Fedrico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* and Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* tied for a distant second. Among the pictures receiving at least one vote were Luis Buñuel's *The Young One* and *Viridiana*, John Cassavetes' *Shadows*, Shirley Clarke's *The Connection*, John Huston's *The Misfits*, Nicholas Ray's *King of Kings*, Karel Reisz's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Robert Rossen's *The Hustler*, François Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player*, and Robert Wise's *West Side Story*. There was no mention of three of my own favorites—Samuel Fuller's *Underworld, U.S.A.*, Marlon Brando's *One-Eyed Jacks*, and Jerry Lewis's *The Ladies Man*—but you can't have everything. In my own view, discussion of the best films of the year was a good idea in 1961 and is still a good idea today.

Obviously we live in different circumstances: a horizontally and vertically integrated U.S. entertainment industry has found new ways of marketing films and controlling distribution; digital technologies have altered the look and even the physical basis of cinema; most people watch movies at home; and the Internet may soon supplant all delivery systems for words, sounds, and images. For many years the study of film has proliferated in the academy, but media departments have increasingly replaced aesthetics with sociology. The deaths of Antonioni and Ingmar Bergman in 2007

NAREMORE'S FILMS OF 2007

1. *Colossal Youth* (*Juventude em Marcha*, Pedro Costa, 2006)
2. *Cuadecuc-Vampir* (Pere Portabella, 1970)
3. *Bamako* (Abderrahmane Sissako, 2006)
4. *Ratatouille* (Brad Bird and Jan Pinkava)
5. *Once* (John Carney, 2006)
6. *No End in Sight* (Charles Ferguson)
7. *Away from Her* (Sarah Polley, 2006)
8. *Black Book* (*Zwartboek*, Paul Verhoeven, 2006)
9. *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (Andrew Dominik)
10. *Mad Men* (Matthew Weiner / American Movie Classics, TV, 2007–)

Honorable mention (alphabetically by title): *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* (Sidney Lumet), *Brand upon the Brain!* (Guy Maddin, 2006), *A Casa de Alice* (*Alice's House*, Chico Teixeira), *The Darjeeling Limited* (Wes Anderson), *Eastern Promises* (David Cronenberg), *Gone Baby Gone* (Ben Affleck), *Helvetica* (Gary Hustwit), *The Host* (Bong Joon-Ho), *I'm Not There* (Todd Haynes), *Inland Empire* (David Lynch), *In the Valley of Elah* (Paul Haggis), *Lions for Lambs* (Robert Redford), *Michael Clayton* (Tony Gilroy), *No Country for Old Men* (Ethan Coen and Joel Coen), *Redacted* (Brian DePalma), *There Will Be Blood* (Paul Thomas Anderson), *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (Ken Loach, 2006), *Zodiac* (David Fincher).

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seemed to put a full stop to a remote era of theatrical exhibition and intense cinephilia. In this environment it may seem quaint for an academic like myself to insist that films are artistically vital and to offer a list of the year's best; one risks being called a dinosaur, a cultural gatekeeper, or worse. I should perhaps acknowledge that my judgments are always provisional and subjective, often undergoing modifications or radical changes as time goes by. I also belong to a particular demographic or "user group," and it's a safe bet that my list of favorite films won't be the same as yours. But the best criticism is usually written in the spirit of what Rob White has called "advocacy," and to rid discourse of evaluation is also to rid it of politics.

Unfortunately, anyone who proposes a list of best pictures is confronted with two practical problems, the first of which is that no critic, not even one who makes a living by reviewing for the daily press, can possibly see all the films released in a given year. In my case the problem is exacerbated because I live most of the time in a college town where every theater is owned by a single corporation and only the most heavily marketed products of the mainstream industry are sure to be exhibited. I also live part of the time in Chicago, but I've had no access to "screener" DVDs and was unable to see a few films of 2007 that received positive reviews. (One example is Vincent Paronnaud and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, which didn't receive a wide U.S. release until 2008.) The second problem has to do with the dating of films. Old productions are found and made available on DVD, new films are given different release dates in different countries, some films go direct to video stores while others open in select U.S. cities at the end of December or the beginning of January. Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *The Lives of Others* appeared on several ten-best films of 2007, but by my reckoning the first of these was originally exhibited in the 1970s and the second had a U.S. screening in 2006; by the same token, Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, which also appears on some 2007 lists, didn't open officially in the US until 2008. To put reasonable limits on my choices, I've restricted myself to feature-length films of any date that, as far as I can determine, had their first U.S. big-screen showing, not counting film festivals, in 2007, plus television films or series that were first broadcast in the past year. My decisions about what should count as a 2007 film are nevertheless, of necessity, somewhat arbitrary. After writing this essay, I discovered that the second film on my list was exhibited briefly in New York in the 1970s, and received a review in the *New York Times*. I've nevertheless decided to keep it on the list because it's very rarely seen and can be justified as a qualified exception

Directors Sarah Polley (top left), Paul Verhoeven (bottom right).

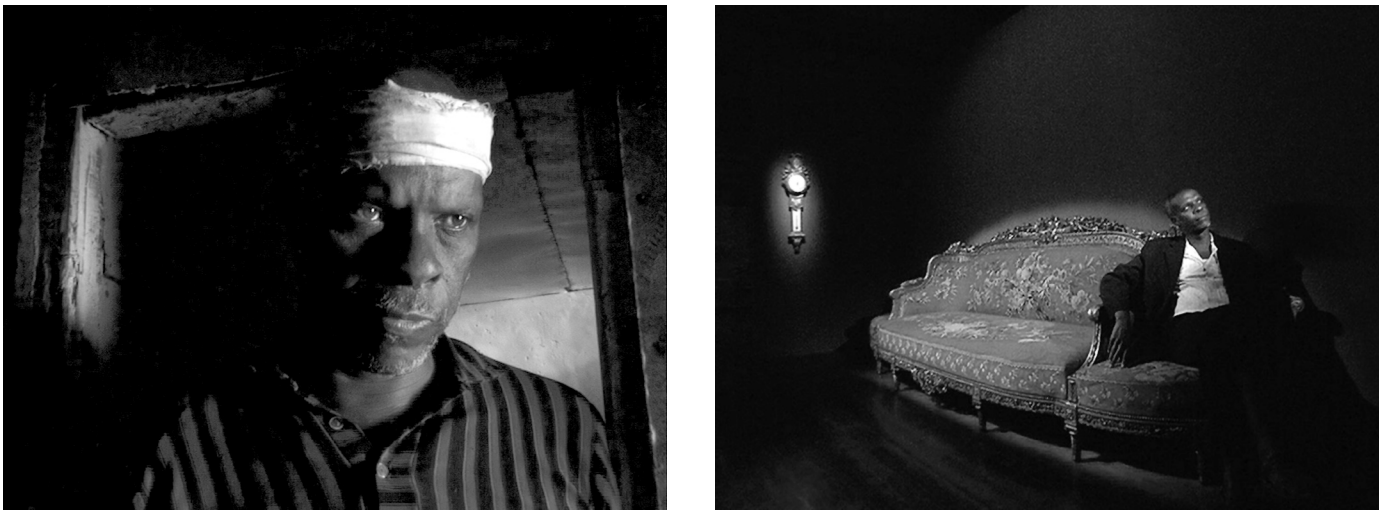
Top: *Away from Her*. Courtesy Metrodome. Bottom: *Black Book*. Photo: Jaap Vrenegoor.

© 2006 Content Film. Courtesy Sony Pictures Classics.

to my rules. Here are my selections, a few of which will require more description than others because they had limited distribution.

1. *COLOSSAL YOUTH*

The most impressive film I saw in 2007 was the 2006 Portuguese/French/Swiss production of Pedro Costa's *Colossal Youth* (*Juventude em Marcha*, properly translated "Youth on the March"), which played at a dozen or so museum or art-cinema venues across the U.S. This is the third in a trilogy of films Costa has made among the poorest slum dwellers of the Fontainhas area in Lisbon, most of whom are immigrants from the rocky, volcanic Cape Verde Islands, a former Portuguese colony established to serve the African



Painterly stillness

Colossal Youth. Courtesy Pedro Costa

slave trade. In 1994, Costa traveled to Cape Verde to make an excellent widescreen fiction film, *Down to Earth* (*Casa de Lava*, or "House of Lava"), and upon returning he brought gifts to people in Fontainhas from their relatives who had worked in the film. Soon he began shooting in the Lisbon favelas, using the residents as actors in a series of improvised "stories" derived from their own experience. His first effort, *Bones* (*Ossos*, 1997), concerns a desperately poor teenage couple and their baby; the second, *In Vanda's Room* (*No Quarto da Vanda*, 2000), takes place almost entirely within a tiny room where Vanda Duarte, a drug addict who appeared in *Bones*, snorts crack cocaine, shoots heroin, and talks with friends. *Colossal Youth* also features Vanda, now clean and taking state-supplied methadone, but the focus has shifted to a black man named Ventura, who also appeared briefly in *Bones*.

At the point when the film begins, Fontainhas has been virtually demolished by city planners and its inhabitants are being moved to a public housing project in Amador on the outskirts of the city. Ventura's wife, fed up with the life he has given her, brandishes a knife and throws him out of their slum dwelling. The seventy-five-year-old Ventura, a tall, slender, haunted figure in a dark suit and a white shirt, wanders about like a lost soul, dreading the clean, well-lighted, but empty rooms the city has assigned him, passing the time by visiting friends and various "children." (He has a damaged memory and so many possible offspring from his history of falling drunkenly into strange beds that neither he nor we can be sure if any of the people he visits are actually his relations; in the strict sense he seems never to have been a legal or emotional father, although his "children" accept him as one of their own.) During his wanderings, we occasionally flash back to the period of the 1974 Portuguese revolution, when he and his friend Lento were guest workers assigned to building projects in Lisbon. Baffled and terrified by the social upheaval around them, they huddle together in a tiny shack, where Ventura composes and ceaselessly repeats a love poem, urging Lento to memorize it for his wife in Cape Verde. The poem is made up partly from lines appropriated from French surrealist Robert Desnos, and partly from lines composed by Ventura himself. Unfortunately, Lento dies in an accident outside the shack and never learns the poem.

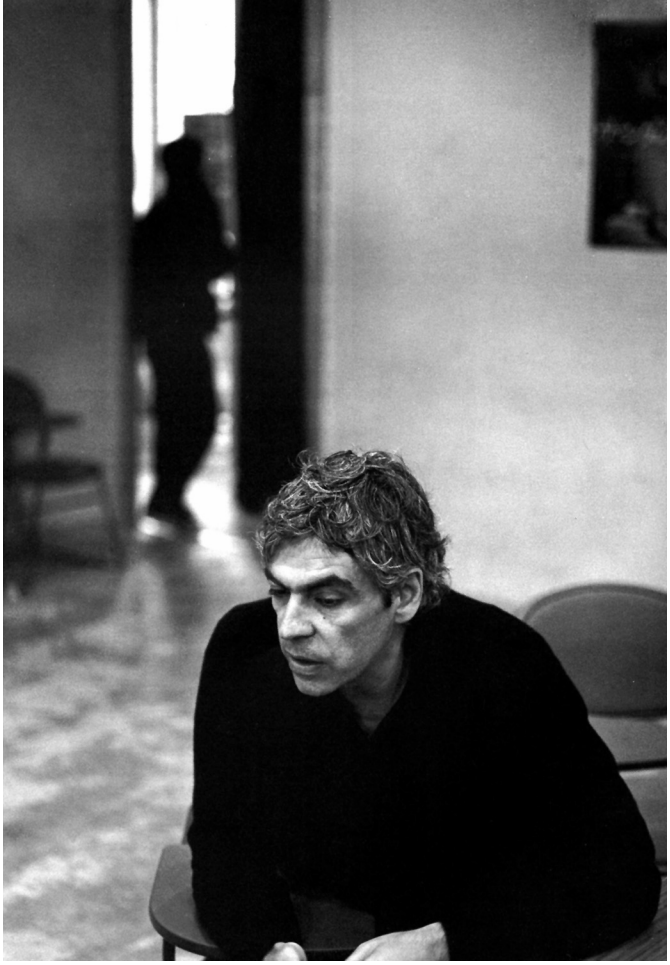
A good deal of the contextual information I've just supplied, such as the source of the poem, derives from program notes for *Colossal Youth* or from published interviews with Costa. The film itself is mysterious, beautiful, and elliptical, so intimately related to its characters that it refuses exposition and leaves us to find our bearings as best we can. Costa's politics will probably not be fully evident to most U.S. viewers; it helps to know that in his youth he enthusiastically celebrated the fall of the fascist dictatorship in Portugal, but later discovered that black workers like Ventura, who had labored to construct Lisbon's museums, schools, and middle-class residences, were completely abandoned by the "democratic" revolution and even persecuted by the Portuguese military. (Useful background on the politics of the film can be found on the web, at chainedtothecinematheque.blogspot.com.)

Like many important films and an equal number of bad or unethical ones, *Colossal Youth* troubles the distinction between documentary and fiction; its most distinctive attribute, however, is that in stylistic terms it works completely against the grain of neo-realism, giving us no sense of grainy, jerky "immediacy." Costa shot the picture without a crew, using only a lightweight digital camera, DAT for sound, and a

couple of microphones and tripods; there was no lighting equipment other than mirrors and Styrofoam reflectors, and in some locations there was no electricity. Nevertheless, *Colossal Youth* has a superbly disciplined feeling for composition and color. The images, which have been compared to Vermeer, seem to rise out of a dialectical conflict between painterly stillness, appropriate to a world where the characters live outside capitalist time, and motion pictures, appropriate to the modernity that surrounds and determines the characters. No wonder the brilliant art photographer Jeff Wall, who is equally sensitive to color, texture, and staged "documentary," is among Costa's admirers.

In a lecture for a group of young filmmakers in Tokyo, published in the online journal *Rouge*, Costa speaks of the way he "resists" the comfortable versatility of the digital camera, refusing to do what "the managers of Panasonic in the skyscrapers of Tokyo" want him to do. "They want me to move it around a lot, and I don't want to move it." His camera usually stands at a respectful distance from the actors, who are treated with discretion, dignity, and patient attention. Each actor in *Colossal Youth* contributed her or his own story, which was modified during rehearsal, and the production took fifteen months of all-day shooting for six days a week, with up to twenty or thirty takes per shot. The finished product consists mainly of lengthy sequence shots exquisitely framed by an unmoving camera, with relatively little figure movement within the frame. (The notes I took at my only viewing indicate a single camera movement—a leisurely 180-degree pan along a pastoral stream outside Lisbon's Gulbenkian museum, looking toward street traffic in the distance.) The atmosphere is hushed, formal, with characters walking in or out of frame in stately, almost ghostly fashion.

Many viewers will become impatient because nothing dramatic happens; in one sequence we listen to an entire record that Ventura plays for Lento ("Labanda Breço," a song in praise of Amilcar Cabral, the leader of the Cape Verdian independence movement), and in another we watch three characters silently eating a meal. But each direct cut to the opening of a new sequence is visually stunning. The most startling is when Costa suddenly cuts to the interior of the Gulbenkian museum, an edifice that Ventura helped to build when he was a construction worker, and where he goes to visit one of his "sons," a museum caretaker. The sequence begins with a distant shot of a small painting by Rubens, almost aglow in a shadowy corner (Costa repeatedly uses a single touch of color to transform monochrome environments); then we cut to a large painting by Van Dyck; and then to Ventura, innocently sitting on one of the art objects, a seventeenth-century French settee upholstered by Gobelins,



Director Pedro Costa

Courtesy Pedro Costa

posed with all the lanky grace of the young Henry Fonda in *My Darling Clementine* (1946).

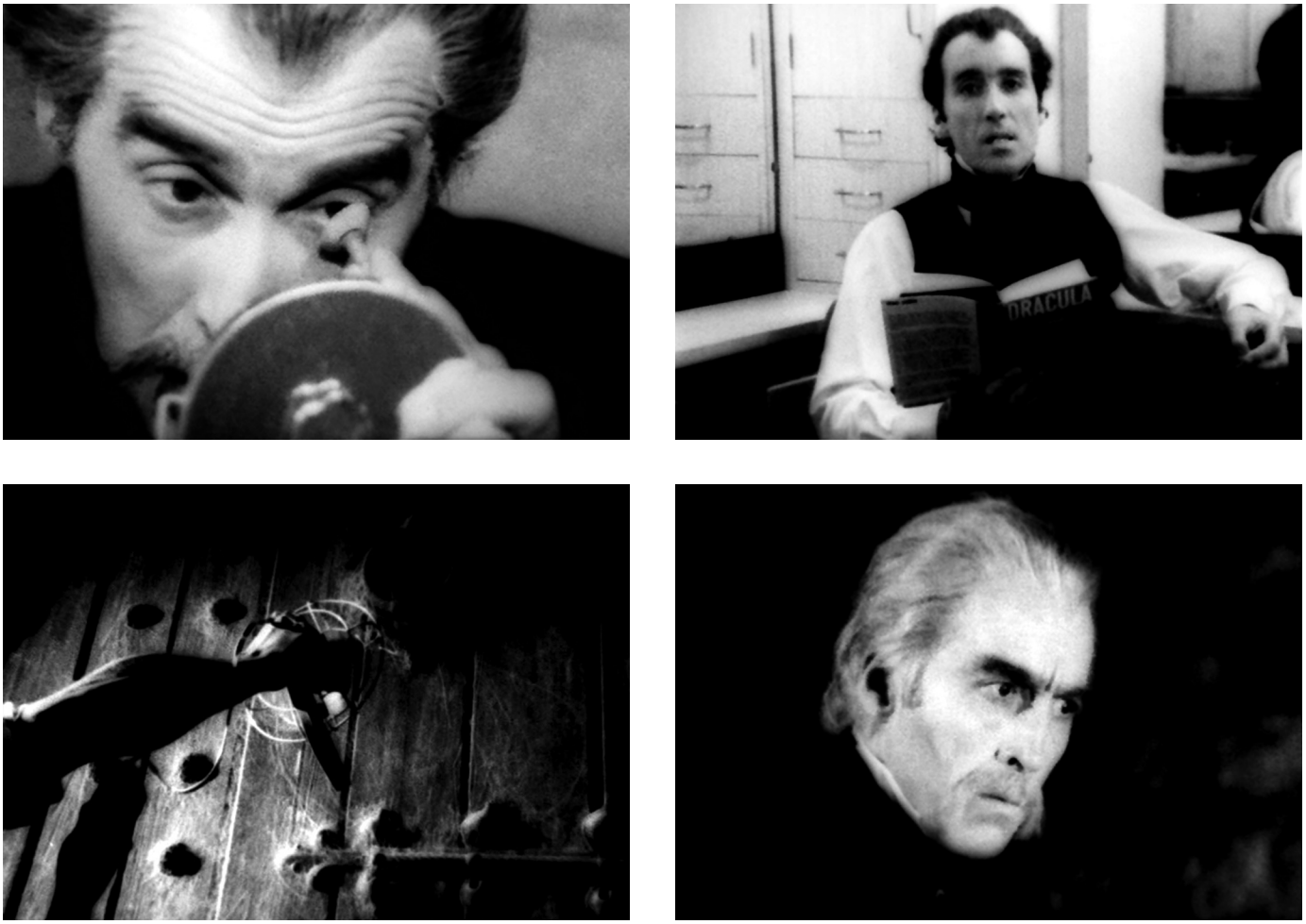
Other sequences have moments of extraordinary intimacy, although the film is never sensational. Ventura's several visits with Vanda, who lives in one of the new high-rise buildings and works as a maid, are especially memorable. A motormouth and a fascinatingly natural performer, Vanda sits on her bed and spins out long, druggy-sounding monologues. She suffers from a head cold and occasionally leans over to spit in a wastebasket. Now and then she pauses to glance at her television set, which is always on, or she looks down at a beautiful, dark-eyed baby girl playing on the floor, and encourages the girl to dance to the television music ("*Dança*, *bebe*, *dança*!"). An equally striking scene occurs toward the end of the film, when Ventura visits one of his "daughters" in a battered hovel in Fontainhas; the two have a quiet, dreamy conversation and begin playing a game of finding shapes of people or objects in the ragged scars on the wall, much as one would find shapes in the clouds. The young woman observes that the housing project where they will soon be moved is covered with white paint; in the new environment, their very imaginations will be impoverished.

Costa is often compared with Bresson, partly because of the unemotional quality of his actors and partly because

of his "empty" shots, in which we see a room or a wall after a character has left the frame. He tends to compare himself with Hollywood directors: with Chaplin, who made street films about the immigrant ghetto; with Ford, who had a "stock company" and a favorite location; and above all with Jacques Tourneur, who was a poetic realist working at the lower levels of the industry. (He also admires Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub, about whom he has made an extraordinary documentary, *Where Lies Your Hidden Smile?* [*Ou Git Votre Sourire Enfoui?*, 2001].) Ultimately, however, he is unique. He risks being charged with aestheticizing poverty, but I agree when he says, borrowing a phrase from Brecht, that he wants only to make "jewels for the poor."

2. *CAUDECUC-VAMPIR*

A seventy-five-minute, quasi-narrative film by Catalan director Pere Portabella, *Caudecuc-Vampir* (1970), was also shown last year in a few U.S. cities, again in the context of a retrospective. Portabella was unknown to me until quite recently, and I'm grateful to Jonathan Rosenbaum, his champion in this country, for calling his work to my attention. Portabella was one of the Spanish producers of Buñuel's *Viridiana*, and because of his anti-Franco politics, the experimental films he began making in the 1970s could be shown in Spain only clandestinely. (His most recent film, *The Silence before Bach* [2007], is among the best of his career.) *Caudecuc-Vampir*, the first word of which is a pun referring to the tail end of a worm and to the unexposed material at the end of a film reel, doesn't seem especially subversive, although it belongs to a well-known avant-garde genre of appropriation in which a new film is made up of material "stolen" from other films. The most influential example of such thievery is Joseph Cornell's *Rose Hobart* (1936), which takes footage from an enjoyably kitschy South Sea Islands picture called *East of Borneo* (1931) and turns it into a collage of fetishized dream imagery devoted to the film's female star. *Cuadecuc-Vampir* is somewhat different in that little if any of its footage comes directly from the film it appropriates. Instead, Portabella creates what might be described as an avant-garde "making of" documentary, composed of silent, widescreen, black-and-



Eerie self-reference

Caudecuc-Vampir. Courtesy pereportabella.com.

white footage that he shot on the Spanish locations of Jess Franco's Techniscope and Eastmancolor *Count Dracula* (1970), an Italian/Spanish/German co-production starring Christopher Lee and Herbert Lom. Portabella "flashed" his footage during the developing process, giving it a blurred, high-contrast look; as a result, everything in Franco's Eurotrashy B-picture—the over-lighted sets, the voluptuous starlets with big hair and heavy mascara, the hammy character actors—is saturated with the surreal, antiquated gloom that haunts such vampire films as Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932), and Maddin's *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary* (2002).

One of the ironies of this situation is that the original film was directed by a man named Franco. *Count Dracula* isn't a bad film (it contains one of Christopher Lee's better performances), and Portabella never condescends to it. Instead he transmogrifies a conventional horror movie into an uncanny experience and a subtle allegory of a blood-sucking Spanish dictatorship. One could also say that *Cuadecuc-Vampir* has a vampire-like relation to the original; it seizes upon the host film with erotic intensity and turns it into a seductive but cadaverous production. Much of what we see was shot directly alongside the original, but from strange, off-center angles, sometimes with a handheld camera. When the actors speak their lines, we hear only the sound design of composer Carles Santos: muffled bumping and knocking, metallic gusts of wind, jet engines, jack-hammers, and "light" jazz or elevator music. Now and then we glimpse Franco's cameramen at work or we become aware of the artificiality of the proceedings—the spirit gum holding wigs in place, the wires that enable fake bats to fly, the actors stepping out of their roles. And yet, because of the eerie, lyrical atmosphere of Portabella's photography and editing, the backstage action looks as spooky as anything in the film's diegesis. At one point Lee, in full make-up as Dracula, prepares to lie down in a coffin and reaches out to swipe jokingly at Portabella's camera; we hear a screech on the soundtrack, Lee smiles, and the film seems to shudder with terror. When Franco's crew sprays artificial fog through a forest or spins "cobwebs" over Dracula's coffin, their work seems as weird as anything in Bram Stoker; and when the actors drive an obviously fake stake through a beautiful woman's heart while the crew stands around watching, the effect is unsettling.

The sense of an all-pervading horror extends even to a coda at the end, when for the first time we hear recorded speech and see ordinary black-and-white photography. A documentary camera (Franco's or Portabella's?) films Christopher Lee in his dressing room, partly in costume, giving an Orson Welles-like disquisition on Stoker's novel. He forgets the name of one of the characters and has to start over. The second take goes smoothly, concluding with a reading of Count Dracula's death scene from the closing pages of the novel. Lee emphasizes the "'look of peace'" in the dying vampire's eyes. Then he glances up and stares dramatically at us. The camera zooms into his eyes. An awkward, lengthy silence ensues before the director shouts "cut," and for a few moments Lee seems more troubling than in the Franco movie—a handsome personification of the living dead.

3. *BAMAKO*

Abderrahmane Sissako's *Bamako* (France/Mali, 2006) takes place in a small square in Bamako, the capital of Mali, where the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are put on trial. Defense lawyers from Europe and prosecution lawyers from Africa present their cases to an African court. A broad array of witnesses is called, and a small audience watches the proceedings. During breaks in the trial, a French lawyer tries to call his clients on his cell phone and is almost butted by a goat. Elsewhere in the square, women are hard at work, hand-dying cloth for gorgeously colored textiles. A few individuals in rooms around the square go on with their lives, among them a beautiful young woman (Assa Maga) who attracts the gazes of men when she strolls past on her way to her job. A wife and mother, she sings in a bar, where we see her suffering the embrace of an ugly male bureaucrat. Her husband, like most of the young men in the community, is unemployed and humiliated. Eventually, he commits suicide.

The foregoing should make clear that *Bamako* isn't a purely realistic film; indeed its most realistic elements, such as the story of the café singer and her husband, are relatively unengaging. As a director, Sissako resembles a more politically lucid and gently humorous Godard, and his best moments are didactic. The fanciful, visually impressive trial scenes, in which Africans speak out against their economic oppression, serve to raise important questions and teach hard truths. The tiny square becomes a microcosm of the nation, and the nation a symbol of sub-Saharan Africa, most of which has had little ability to represent itself in the modern media. At the trial, the intelligent and often witty testimony exposes the workings of the IMF and World Bank, twin organizations charged with regulating the international monetary system and lending money to developing nations. Since the 1980s, the neo-liberal leaders of these organizations have imposed "structural adjustments" on the debts of poor countries in order to force them to balance their budgets. Radical "reforms" benefiting the rich have been widely imposed, none of which would be tolerated in wealthier nations to the north (although the Republican governments in the U.S. since

African indictment

Bamako. © 2007 Archipel 33, Chiguitty Films, ARTE France, Mali Images. DVD: Artificial Eye (U.K.).

Ronald Regan have managed to institute a few of them). These include the end of state subsidies for agriculture, the dismantling of public services, and the severe reduction of public-sector jobs for teachers, doctors, and social workers. The debtor nations have also been forced to "privatize" their natural resources, which, with the aid of corrupt officials, have been signed over to multinational corporations. As a result, the poorest countries are poorer than they were twenty years ago; their child mortality has risen, their literacy and life expectancy have fallen, and they are dependant on foreign imports of goods they could produce. Meanwhile, as one of the witnesses observes, the west has become preoccupied with terrorism and immigration, both of which are directly related to western economic policy.

Occasionally we cut away from the trial to see bits of evidence. Columns of black men struggle across the desert, dying from their attempt to escape the continent and find work in Europe. African children gather around a battered TV set and watch an American Western—a parody starring Danny Glover (one of the producers of *Bamako*), in which bad men ride into an African town and shoot down the local teachers. Much of this might sound depressing, but in fact *Bamako* is an exhilarating, brightly colored film that lets us see the beauty and great potential of Africa. The Europeans at the trial don't seem like stage villains, and several points of view are expressed. Ironically, one of the most eloquent witnesses is an old farmer who "sings" a powerful *cri de coeur* in a language nobody understands. Like everyone else in this invigorating, unusual picture, he stimulates learning and calls attention to something important and seldom seen.

4. *RATATOUILLE*

G. W. F. Hegel once wrote that because cooking is intended for consumption rather than contemplation, it can never become an art. If only he could have visited Gusteau's, a once-great Paris restaurant that looks like the Tour d'Argent. Rats have infested the kitchen, but not to worry—among them is a rodent named Renny (voiced by Patton Oswalt), a genius of gastronomy who whips up inspired dishes and enables Linguini (Lou Romano), the untalented, sweet-tempered heir of deceased chef Gusteau, to rise to success and find love with a female cook named Colette (Janeane Garofalo). In the process, Renny foils the plans of the current boss and true pest, Skinner (Ian Holm), who wants to turn Gusteau's into a fast-food brand; and he melts the heart of influential food critic Anton Ego (Peter O'Toole), "the Grim Eater."

Brad Bird and Jan Pinkava's *Ratatouille* (2007), the animated feature from Pixar that tells this story, is a gently satiric, sometimes quite funny valentine to Paris and a lovely fable about the social and spiritual wonder of art. Chef Gusteau, whom Anton Ego sneeringly compares to "Monsieur Boy-ar-dee," has authored a cookbook entitled *Anyone Can Cook*; the book inspires Renny, but not anyone can cook like him. The point of the film is simply that great talent can come from anywhere; to find an opportunity for expression and to transform an audience, however, the artistic impulse often needs to overcome poverty, prejudice, and conventional thinking, even in the artist's own family.

It would be easy to dismiss this "lesson" as middlebrow romanticism, equivalent to the picture-postcard views of Paris that *Ratatouille* so charmingly evokes. But as the ultra-sophisticated French theorist Pierre Bordieu has argued, middlebrow art is often a site of class struggle, enabling those on the lower rungs of society to gain knowledge and help to shape cultural values. *Ratatouille* exemplifies that tendency and has a democratic, comically utopian quality. It takes place in the hierarchical, traditional, nearly all-male world of haute cuisine, but one of its funniest moments comes when the motherless Renny prepares a dish of ratatouille ("sounds like ratpatootie," Linguine says) that gives Anton Ego a Proustian experience and takes him back to the maternal hearth. In the end, when the public learns that a rat has been cooking at Gousteau's, the place is nailed up by health authorities; this problem is solved, however, when Renny, Linguini, Colette, and nearly everyone else moves to a simpler bistro where Renny's rat pack is given a home, where Ego has joyful meals ("Astonish me!"), and where a community of ordinary customers spills out into the street.

Where computer animation is concerned, the film results in something close to a new art form with its own phenomenology. At one level it imitates realistic, studio-era motion pictures: its "sets" are amazingly detailed; its views of Paris in what appears to be the 1950s or 60s seem to capture every rooftop and cobblestone; its characters have rounded, three-dimensional shapes; its "camera" glides around rooms; and some of its shots are designed to look like photographic images in which the foreground and deep background are slightly out of focus. Certain objects—a glass of red wine, for instance—are indistinguishable from a photograph. At the same time, however, the characters look like cartoon figures, moving with the magically swift, comically exaggerated quality of classic animation. The push-pull between hyperrealism and visible, computerized artifice is developed into a playful, highly self-conscious technique, which sometimes becomes a source of jokes (a black-and-white TV in Linguini's tiny apartment shows *Brief Encounter*, but in animated form). Digital technology makes the technique possible, but, as with Renny's cooking, not everyone can manipulate it with such talent and panache.

Passion in the kitchen

Ratatouille. © Walt Disney Pictures, Pixar Animation Studios

5. *ONCE*

Ratatouille might have been even better if it had songs, like so many 2007 films, including *Across the Universe*, *Hairspray*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Control*, *I'm Not There*, *Love and Cigarettes*, and *Walk Tall*. Of this group, Todd Haynes's *I'm Not There* deserves special mention for its deconstruction of the biopic and its kaleidoscopic view of Bob Dylan's very American, self-fashioned series of star images. Few Hollywood films, not even Quentin Tarantino's, have been so dense with esoteric allusions, in this case both to Dylan and to the movies. Haynes wittily employs five different actors to play Dylan's "selves," and, like the two Andersons (Wes and Paul Thomas), makes excellent use of widescreen. Even so, *I'm Not There* seems more interested in myths than music; it gives too little sense of why Dylan is a compelling composer–performer, and in some ways made me prefer old fashioned pictures like *The Jolson Story* (1948).

I was more taken with John Carney's *Once* (2006), an extremely low-budget production from Ireland, which is full of sweet surprises and songs performed by real musicians. It's the only movie I've seen about post-Tin Pan Alley music that isn't about drugs, booze, sex, and the corrosive effects of fame, and in small ways it overturns other clichés. A street singer (Glen Hansard) chases down a teenage drug addict who has robbed him, but after wrestling the culprit to the ground the singer gives him a hug, a lecture, and a few coins. Later, an ethereally pretty Czech flower girl (Marketa Irglova) befriends the singer and takes him to her apartment house; hanging around the front stoop are a group of men, including a black fellow wearing a hood and smoking a cigarette, who I feared might be toughs but who greet the young woman as friends and fellow workers. The singer has a job helping his father in a vacuum-cleaner shop; I expected conflict between father and son (à la *Ratatouille*), but the father turns out to be a nice guy. The singer and the flower girl develop a romantic relationship, but they never even kiss; he's still mooning about his former lover, and she has a baby daughter in Dublin and a husband back in Europe. They form a band together and have a successful recording session, but at the end he goes off to London and she stays in Dublin.

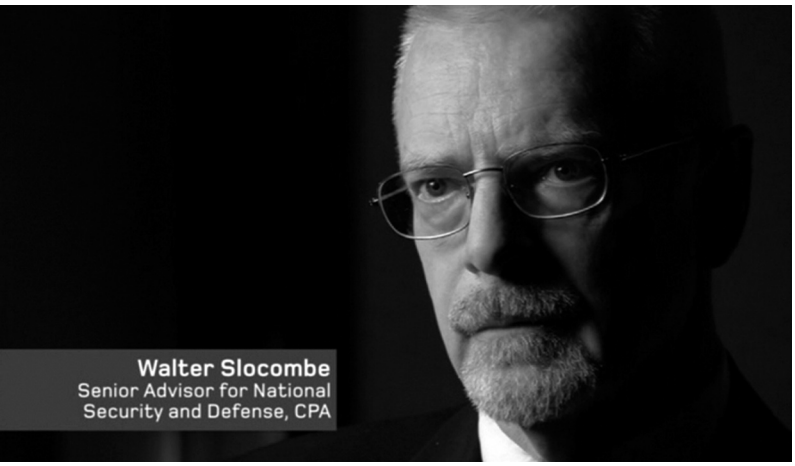
A gentle Tin Pan Alley

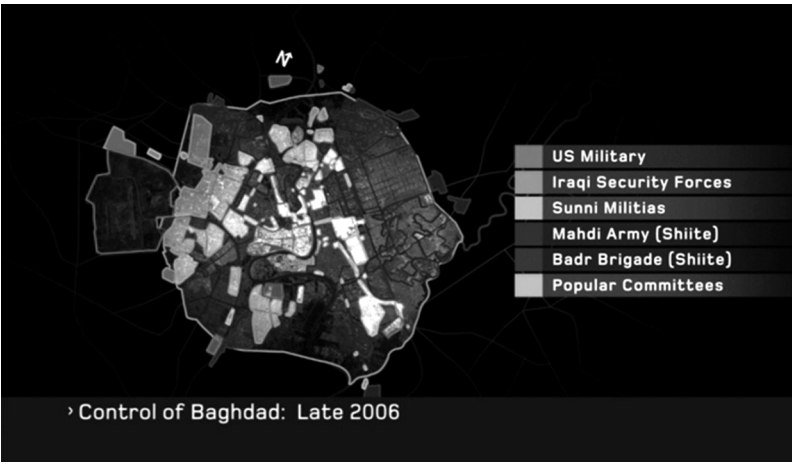
Once. © 2007 Summit Entertainment LP, Samson Film Limited

Despite these offbeat touches, *Once* has a good deal in common with classic Hollywood musicals. It tells a boy-meets-girl story about two people from different worlds who decide to put on a show, and it ingeniously uses songs to advance the story. (Consider "Broken Hearted Hoover Fixer Sucker Guy," an improvised tune played in the back of a bus, which provides exposition and tells us something about the singer's reluctance to talk about his past.) A few of the numbers are as good in their own modest way as anything from the heyday of MGM. At one point the girl goes out at night in a robe and slippers to buy a battery for a portable CD player, and as she walks home listing to music and composing lyrics, the camera executes a beautiful tracking shot that feels like a neorealist version of Vincente Minnelli. The initial love duet for the boy and girl is played in the back of a music store on an old guitar and a grand piano, and was performed live rather than in playback. If you aren't charmed and touched by it, you and I will probably never be intimate friends.

6. *NO END IN SIGHT*

In 2007, Hollywood liberals produced three worthwhile fiction films about the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. The most dramatically effective is Paul Haggis's *In the Valley of Elah*, anchored by Tommy Lee Jones's restrained performance as the grieving father of a dead soldier; the most cinematically inventive is Brian De Palma's *Redacted*, a low-budget, in-your-face indictment of censored U.S. violence against the Iraqis; and the most critically underrated is Robert Redford's *Lions for Lambs*, a near Brechtian dramatization of conversations between a teacher and a student, a journalist and a politician, and a couple volunteer soldiers. Unfortunately,





U.S. policy under investigation

No End in Sight. © 2007 Representational Pictures LLC. DVD: Magnolia Home Entertainment.

none of these films did well at the box office. Conservative columnists and bloggers were gleeful when *Redacted* lasted only a few days on some screens, and concluded that people don't like to be preached to. Meanwhile, muliplexes around the country were opening their shows with another kind of suasion: "Citizen/Soldier," a lengthy ad for the U.S. Army National Guard, consisting of a montage of glossy, computer-enhanced images of young people in military gear, moving to the beat of an excruciatingly bad, all-white rock band called 3 Doors Down.

I sometimes wish the hucksters and politicians responsible for selling the invasion of Iraq and the thirty percent of Americans who still support Bush could be strapped down to theater seats like Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and forced to watch over and over again what is easily the best of the Iraq films from 2007: Charles Ferguson's *No End in Sight*, a straightforward, talking-heads documentary that provides jaw-dropping evidence of the U.S. administration's arrogance, mendacity, and incompetence. After using the "war on terror" as a pretext for invading the only Mideast nation that was a barrier to Islamic fundamentalism, the Bush gang ignored the advice of the military and didn't put enough troops on the ground to secure order; then they disbanded the Iraqi military and forced most of the country's civil servants and teachers into unemployment; then they left the nation's historical treasures and caches of weapons and explosives exposed to looters and insurgents. To top it off, having made little or no plans for post-war occupation, they dismissed most U.S. Foreign Service personnel with Mideast experience and replaced them with young Republican apparatchiks, including a recent college graduate who was given the job of drawing up a traffic plan for Baghdad. Too bad Ferguson's chronicle of these criminal errors had to be shown in theaters rather than on non-cable, network television; but, as Redford's *Lions for Lambs* indicates, after a quarter century of mostly right-wing government in the U.S., the news networks have completely lost their souls.

7. AWAY FROM HER

Iraq also makes its way unexpectedly into Sarah Polley's Canadian production of *Away from Her* (2006), in which a woman, Fiona (Julie Christie), with an advanced case of Alzheimer's disease watches a news report of the U.S. invasion on a TV set in a nursing home. The woman's memory is so impaired that she seems not to recognize her husband of forty-four years, Grant (Gordon Pinsent); but when she sees images of U.S. soldiers in combat, she asks herself, "How could they forget Vietnam?"

Polley's adaptation of Alice Munro's "The Bear Came over the Mountain" is the best of several films in 2007 about illness or aging—among them the comic *The Savages*, the spectacular *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, the saccharine *Evening*, and the awful *The Bucket List*. Its greatest virtue lies in Polley's careful avoidance of sentimentality, showy cinematic style, feel-good jokes, or sublime images of nature—all

The cold of winter

Away from Her. © 2006 The Film Farm, Foundry Films, Pulling Focus Pictures Inc. DVD: Metrodome (U.K.).

common strategies in films of this type. She also refuses to use too many flashbacks that show the married couple in their youth. The film's few touches of humor have an undertone of sadness, and the quietly subdued imagery of snow and cross-country skiing is nicely used to suggest key themes—marriage, separation, aging, the end of a relationship, and the loss of memory. The almost luxurious nursing home where much of the action takes place is bland and suburban, but never sinister; it's probably the best one could expect, although strain is evident on the smiling face of the lady in charge (Wendy Crewson), and the patients on the second floor, whose disease has "progressed," look like zombies.

Throughout, Christie's line readings are superb, letting us see intelligent awareness alongside bewilderment and anxiety. On the day when she's taken to the home, she asks her college-professor husband where she's headed; then she smiles a little flirtatiously and says, "Just kidding." En route, she tells him there are things in their past she'd like to forget, especially his infidelities with students. Her strength, resolve, and lack of self-pity are palpable, and her last hour in bed with her husband is lovely and poignant. We can never be sure if she no longer recognizes him after she takes up with a mute, wheelchair-bound resident of the home (Michael Murphy). "You certainly are persistent," she says in a polite but slightly annoyed way when the husband keeps showing up like a suitor with flowers. She's as beautiful and seemingly alive to her surroundings as ever, but a different person. 2007 wasn't a great year for women's roles in the movies, especially for older women, but this film shows what we've been missing. *Away from Her* is a crowning moment in Christie's memorable career.

8. *BLACK BOOK*

"What's my role in this boy's club?" asks Carise van Hauten in Paul Verhoeven's Dutch/German/British production of *Black Book* (*Zwartboek*, 2006). Actually, a good one, and she makes the most of it. As Rachel Stein/Ellis de Vries, a spirited young Jewish cabaret singer concealing her identity from Nazis in The Hague at the close of World War II, van Hauten becomes a combination of Mata Hari, Marlene Dietrich, and Pearl White. The momentum of her adventures keeps accelerating and her hair-breadth escapes pile up almost to the point of absurdity. Verhoeven handles the action in a style reminiscent of old-school Hollywood, and his mingling of eroticism and suspense, enhanced by Anne Dudley's rather Bernard Herrmann-like score, is so entertaining that some viewers might not notice the film's underlying seriousness.

The story is based loosely on a melange of actual characters and events, some of which echo in the present. The

Troubled by torture

Top three: *Black Book*. © 2006 Film & Entertainment VIP Medienfonds 4 GmbH & Co. KG. DVD: High Fliers/Tartan Films (U.K.). Bottom two: *The Bourne Ultimatum*. © 2007 Universal Studios, Motion Picture BETA Produktiongesellschaft mbH & Co. KG. DVD: Universal Studios (U.K.).

occupying Nazis, for example, describe the captured members of the Dutch resistance as "terrorists" and subject them to a kind of water-boarding. (In his voiceover commentary for the DVD edition of *Black Book*, Verhoeven makes pointed remarks about the state-terrorist occupation and water torture performed by the U.S. during the Iraq War. Waterboarding was also on the minds of Hollywood filmmakers in 2007. In *The Bourne Ultimatum*, one of the year's biggest and, despite the awards it received, worst-edited blockbusters, we discover that Jason Bourne [Matt Damon] lost his memory because he was tortured by a Dick Cheney type [Albert Finney] at the CIA, who put an Abu Ghraib-style bag over Bourne's head and subjected him to simulated drowning.) In several respects Verhoeven keeps the viewer off balance, emphasizing historical ironies and blurring the boundaries between the Germans and the Dutch. The Dutch Calvinists who shelter the Jewish heroine at the beginning of the film force her to recite New Testament verses before she can eat; a Christian fundamentalist in the resistance turns out to be violently unstable; and the head of the Gestapo (Sebastian Koch) is an unexpectedly nice fellow with whom the heroine falls in love. ("Are these a Jew's breasts?" she asks him, alluding to *The Merchant of Venice*.) As the story develops, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between resistance fighters and collaborators. The only constant is violence, which continues after the war, when Rachel settles with her husband and children in an Israeli kibbutz on the eve of the Suez Crisis.

9. *THE ASSASSINATION OF JESSE JAMES BY THE COWARD ROBERT FORD*

2007 witnessed an unusual number of Westerns (or pictures with Western settings) and noir-like crime films. In the latter group are several excellent pictures, including, in order of my own preference, *Gone Baby Gone*, *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead*, *Eastern Promises*, *Michael Clayton*, and *Zodiac*. The Coen brothers' Academy-Award-winning Western noir, *No Country for Old Men*, has white-knuckle suspense, a scary/funny performance by Javier Bardem as Anton Chigurh (pronounced "sugar'), and the best pit-bull-chasing-a-man scene anyone is ever going to achieve; but the moral-philosophical narration by an aging Texas lawman (Tommy Lee Jones) strikes me as unearned and a bit hypocritical, especially given the Coens' apparent relish for sadism, and the treatment of the border between the U.S. and Mexico is full of crime-movie stereotypes. I'm equally divided about Paul Thomas Anderson's much-praised *There Will Be Blood*, which has an intense performance by Daniel Day-Lewis and a nicely worked out mirror-image relationship between an oil tycoon and an evangelist (Paul Dano), who are depicted as a pair of gimlet-eyed con men in deadly struggle with one another. Several critics have described the film as "epic," but my idea of an epic about oil in the southwest is *Giant* (1956), which

Showbiz executioner

The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford. © 2007 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., Virtual Studios LLC. DVD: Warner Home Video.

was shot in the same Texas location as the Anderson picture, but which involves a much larger group of interesting characters and shows a greater concern with class conflict and national history. *There Will Be Blood* creates an illusion of historical sweep (it begins in 1898 and ends in 1924) but is actually a rather narrow psychological drama concerning Anderson's favorite theme: love/hate between fathers and sons.

To these films I prefer Andrew Dominik's *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007), a lavishly produced adaptation of Ron Hansen's dense nonfiction novel, which was originally over three hours long and has been cut to a leisurely, atmospheric 160 minutes. In the process of condensation, Dominik may have jettisoned historical information. He gives us too little sense of Jesse's racism and murderous ruthlessness, and of his ability to manipulate his public image so that loyalists of the old Confederacy thought of him as a courtly outlaw or Robin Hood. He also limits what we know about Jesse's domestic life and seems to have left a good deal of the talented Mary-Louise Parker's role as Zee James on the cutting-room floor. But much remains to admire. The landscape photography (by Roger Deakins, who also photographed *In the Valley of Elah* and *No Country for Old Men*) and the near-poetic off-screen narration are worthy of Terrence Malick at his best, and the screenplay hews closely to the intriguing narrative spine of the novel, which is not only a study of the mass psychology of hero worship but also, more interestingly, an ironic retelling of the story of Jesus and Judas. The Jesse we meet in the film, nicely played by Brad Pitt, is nearing the end of his criminal career; a blend of bourgeois paterfamilias and crazy, somewhat dandified killer, he is vain about his reputation and seems to have a melancholy awareness that death is approaching—indeed he participates in his demise and in the heightening of his legend by keeping a potential betrayer, one of his most smarmy disciples, close at hand. (When the killer shoots him in the back, Jesse can see the gun reflected in the glass frame of a picture he is dusting.) Bob Ford (Casey Affleck, in a career-making performance) is at first a callow, ingratiating acolyte who wants, as Lacan would say, to become the phallus. Instead, partly to achieve fame and partly to protect himself from Jesse, he becomes an assassin, and for the remainder of his life is imprisoned by the James myth. Jesse's embalmed body is put on display as entertainment for the curious and worshipful; and Bob, who matures into a brooding, troubled figure, has a brief career on stage, acting himself in the James story. At the end, he too is melancholy, and is shot down from behind by one of Jesse's yahoo-like fans. All this is depicted in nearly tactile images of late nineteenth-century Americana, and in narration, dialogue, and performances that convey the beauty and grotesquerie of a strange, provincial culture—a culture redolent of the Bible and Shakespeare, but inclining toward pulp fiction and show business.

10. *MAD MEN*

My last choice returns us to 1960–61, when *Film Quarterly* published its initial "Films of the Year." Jack Kennedy is running for President against Dick Nixon, and the men at the Sterling-Cooper Advertising Agency on Madison Avenue have been assigned the Nixon account. A cocky crew of racist, sexist white males (plus one closeted homosexual), the "Mad men," as they call themselves, spend much of their time making passes at the office secretaries and competing for the approval of Don Draper (Jon Hamm), a tall, dark, and handsome executive who lives in an affluent suburb with a beautiful blond wife (January Jones) and a couple of kids. Draper is so talented he can successfully market Lucky Strikes even though *Reader's Digest* has recently published a report on cancer and cigarettes. On the surface, he and his wife make an ideal couple, a bit like Rock Hudson and Doris Day in *Lover Come Back* (1961), except in that film Rock and Doris *both* worked on Madison Avenue. In reality, Draper is as much a self-invented American type as Bob Dylan; he has a hidden past and new name, and he's a secret adulterer, preferring sex with a Greenwich Village artist and a Jewish heiress instead of his WASP wife. The wife, meanwhile, is seriously depressed. Draper sends her to a psychiatrist, who telephones Draper with detailed accounts of her sessions.

This is the opening setup in *Mad Men* (2007–), a seductively entertaining new series developed for the American Movie Classics channel by Matthew Weiner, who also worked on *The Sopranos*. As with most serial dramas, the show has a "paradigmatic" structure that moves us between different story lines; the secretaries at Sterling-Cooper, for example, include a va-va-voom redhead named Joan (Christiana Hendricks) and a relatively plain but talented new brunette named Peggy (Elisabeth Moss), both of whom have troubling affairs with the advertising men. As we shift back and forth between office politics and domestic life, we become increasingly aware of the cultural anthropology of the period. The show's historical details are accurate and amusing (Draper invents the name "carousel" for a new 35mm slide projector; and when Joan shows Betty a new IBM Selectric typewriter, she remarks, "The men who designed it made it simple enough for women to use"), and the production design creates a certain nostalgia for a world in which men chain-smoke, wear Brooks Brothers suits, and have three-martini lunches. Some of the episodes resemble Todd Haynes's *Far From Heaven* (2002) and therefore have the effect of Douglas Sirk with the gloves off; on the whole, however, the tone is darkly satiric and intelligently aware that the period itself was both envious and critical of Madison Avenue. (One of the witty touches is that the eccentric head of Sterling-Cooper is played by Robert Morse, who in 1961 was the star of a Broadway satire of advertising, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*.) For all its historical fetishism, *Mad Men* foregrounds its links with our own time. It brings ongoing American social tensions explicitly to the surface and expresses strong ambivalence about the past. It knows that in 1961 the nation was beginning to change in progressive ways; but it also knows that we continue to live in a world of lies, hype, and corporate maneuvering, which have assumed more spectacular, all-pervasive forms than Don Draper could imagine. I look forward to the future episodes.

Office politics and married life

Mad Men. © Doug Hyun / AMC.

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ABSTRACT Prefaced by remarks about methodology, this article presents a survey of films (and one television show) released in the U.S. in 2007 which James Naremore evaluates to be the best of the year. The top three are: Pedro Costa's *Colossal Youth*, Pere Portabella's *Cuadecuc-Vampir*, and Abderrahmane Sissako's *Bamako*.

KEYWORDS Pedro Costa, Pere Portabella, Abderrahmane Sissako, evaluation, *Mad Men*.

THE ONTOLOGY OF A FETISH

DUDLEY ANDREW SCRUTINIZES A HITHERTO-UNPUBLISHED TYPESCRIPT FRAGMENT BY ANDRÉ BAZIN

Stacked nearly a meter high in my attic are photocopies of all—or nearly all—Bazin's published writings. This amounts to over 2600 items, of which, scandalously, less than seven percent are available in French or English.[1] With such a treasure of material that he sent out for the world to read, why am I fascinated by a single sheet he typed but never published, one I cannot even date with accuracy? I discovered it while preparing the forewords for the re-edition of *What is Cinema?* (University of California Press). Glancing through material I had gathered thirty years earlier when working up Bazin's biography, I carefully opened Sartre's *L'Imaginaire*, the yellowed volume that had been on the bookshelf above Bazin's deathbed and that Janine, his widow, had let me choose as a souvenir in 1974. There weren't many books to choose from (I've never discovered what sort of library he maintained), but at the time I was excited to have irrefutable proof of his interest in Sartre. *The Psychology of the Imagination* (as it was called in English until recently) had been important to me in my undergraduate days, and it was gratifying to know that the inclinations of my own line of thought converged with his.

But until I reopened this fragile volume in 2004, I hadn't known just how central it was to him. There on pages 38 and 39 were penciled underlinings of passages that he indubitably reworked for the essay that would anchor his career and make his reputation, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." Even without his mark-up, certain shared phrases leap out, especially those concerning the "magic" and "irrational" nature of the image. In the very first paragraph of the French original, Bazin develops the psychoanalytic role of images. He writes of "the arrow-pierced clay bear to be found in prehistoric caves, a substitute for the living animal that will ensure a successful hunt." Now listen to Sartre: "the effigy of wax pierced with a pin, the wounded bison painted on the walls to make the hunt more fruitful." Or look at Bazin's daring assertion: "the image proceeds from the ontology of the model; it *is* the model." This scandalous claim seems more defensible when set beside what Sartre had written (and what Bazin underlined): "The portrait of Pierre acts on us—almost—like Pierre in person . . . I say 'This is a portrait of Pierre,' or, more briefly: 'This is Pierre.'" Both men employ as a key example the portrait of a king. Concerning "the image-portrait" of King Charles VIII in the Uffizi Gallery Sartre says, "The object is posited as absent, but the impression is present. Here we have an irrational synthesis . . . the dead Charles VIII is there, present before us. It is he that we see, not the picture. And yet we posit him as not being there. We have only reached him 'as imaged' by 'the intermediary' of the picture. One sees that the relation that consciousness posits in the imaging attitude between the portrait and its subject is [properly speaking] magical."[2] Bazin used a different king, Louix XIV, and a different painter, Charles Le Brun, to evoke the same irrational synthesis. Western civilization's way of preserving its noble leaders on painted canvas is but a variant of Egyptian mummification, though, as opposed to Sartre, Bazin sees an evolution whereby painting has passed beyond an earlier phase when art's mission was tied to magic. We know that Sartre occasionally attended Bazin's ciné-club near the Sorbonne in 1943. Did they ever discuss the fetish power of the image?

This physical object produced by La Librarie Gallimard in Spring 1940, this book Bazin purchased when he was twenty-two, became my fetish when it fell into my hands. I can't but read the dozen marginalia and underlinings as scars in the struggle between student and master philosopher. (Bazin's wonderful piece on Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* [1940], for instance—his inaugural contribution to *Esprit* in 1945—lights up when set beside pages 40–44 of *L'Imaginaire*.) But there was far more of Bazin in this volume. As I slowly turned the pages in summer 2004, looking for additional scribbles, a folded sheet fluttered out: Bazin's writing that had been stuffed inside the body of Sartre's.

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Photographie: "représentant analogique","analogon"(Sartre)

photo-souvenir et photo-art:la première a une fonction simple(jouer le rôle de véhicule),la séconde joue sur l'ambiguïté de sa nature:en tant que produit mécanique,elle renvoie àu réel,ddont elle est la fixation;en tant que forme visible,elle tente de retenir l'attention sur cet aspect d'elle-même. Un angle bizarre peut suffire à retenir ainsi l'oeil,sur la forme avant qu'il ne s'échappe vers la réalité qu'il vise.

Ce qui est fixé c'est le réel.

La photographie de la cuisinière de Landru prend une force émotive grace à la confiance immédiate que l'on accorde à la photographie. A travers cette représentation de l'objet ,c'est l'objet qui émeut et non la représentation. L'objet lui-même émouvrait davantage.

Qu'une bande d'actualité,par hasard,nous restitue cet objet dans l'évènement qui lui a valu de devenir mémorable et émouvant,que cette cuisinière qui nous émeut parce qu'elle évoque certain fait-divers dont elle était le pivot,soit ,par la vertu de l'enrégistrementc cinématographique,rendue présente dans ses coordonnées réelles,alors le titre de "représentant analogique" que nous avons donné à la phptographie s'élargit. La photographie de famille était la famille immobilisée hic et nunc,le film la rend à la fluidité de soneespace et de son temps. La photo était un <u>document</u>,le film est un <u>documentaire</u>.

Que maintenant on imagine ce film passant en direct à la TV. Voilà que le documentaire devient contemporain du spectateur,que celui-ci est convié à participer à un évènement qui lui est montré par le truchement de la technique cinématographique.

PHOTOGRAPHY: "REPRÉSENTANT ANALOGIQUE," "ANALOGON" (SARTRE)

Photo-souvenir and photo-art: the first has a simple function (that of a vehicle); the second plays on the ambiguity of its nature; insofar as it is a mechanical product, it refers to the real of which it is the fixation; insofar as it is a visible form, it tries to hold our attention on the visible aspect of itself. A bizarre angle suffices to grab the eye in this way, on its form, before the eye can escape toward the reality that it aims at.

That which is fixed is the real. The photograph of Landru's oven takes on an emotive force thanks to the immediate confidence that one accords the photograph. Through this representation of the object, it is the object that moves us, not the representation. The object itself would move us even more.

If a piece of newsreel should, perchance, restore for us this object within the event which made it memorable and moving, that is, if this oven, which moves us because it evokes certain tawdry news-items of which it was the pivot, should be rendered present in its real coordinates by virtue of cinematic recording, then the rubric "représentant analogique" that we have given to the photograph is enlarged. The family photo may be the family immobilized in a here and now; but a film renders the fluidity of its space and of its time. The photo was a *document*, the film is a *documentary*.

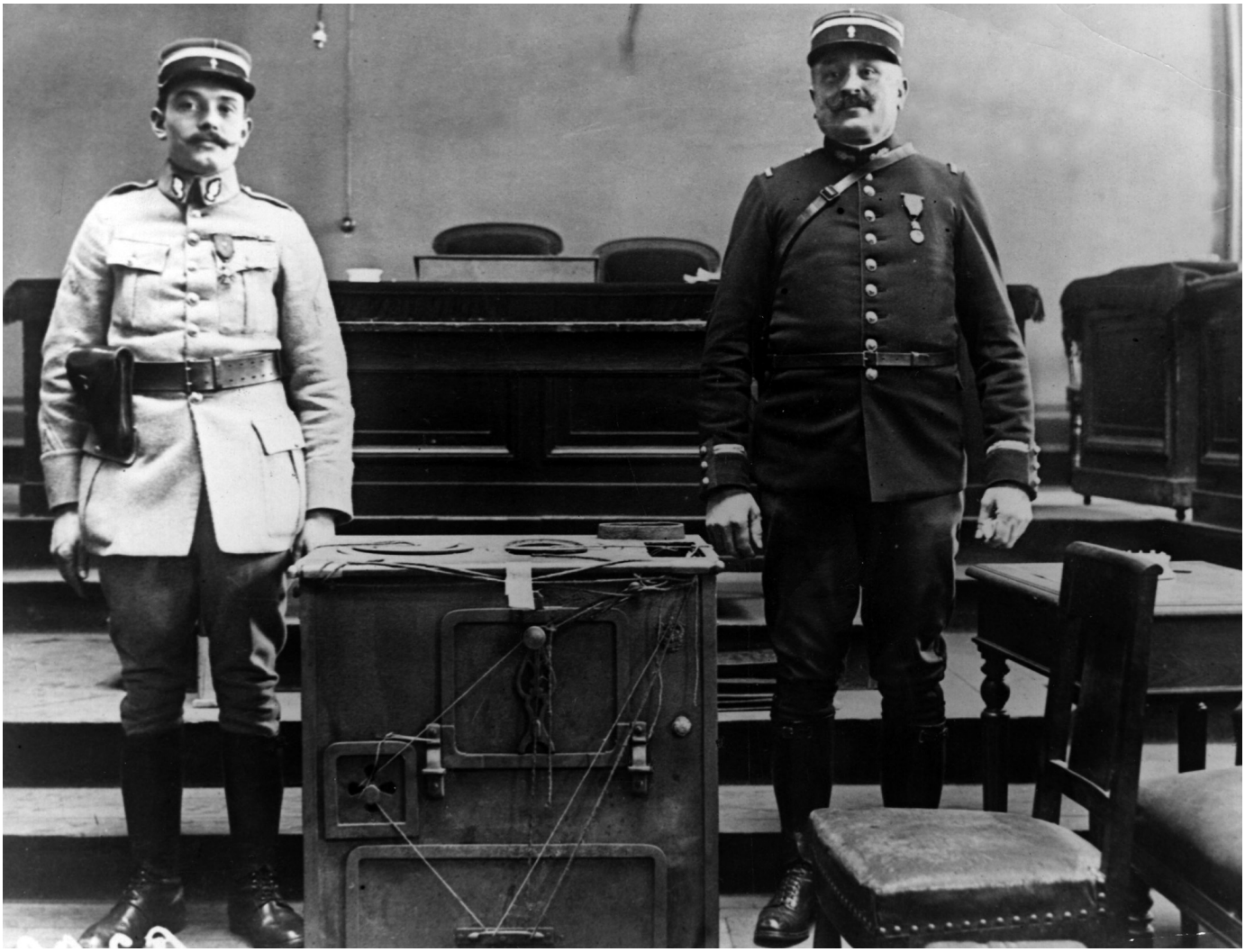
Now let us imagine this film broadcast on live TV. Then the documentary becomes contemporary with the spectator, as the spectator is led to participate in an event which is displayed to him through the work of cinematographic technique.
[Translated by Dudley Andrew]

When did he take the time to type up this sheet? When backlit, the page reveals a watermark, "Maton-Paris," Maton being a city in Alsace known for paper manufacture. Short of carbon-dating, however, there seems no way to tell when Bazin turned the platen and rolled this sheet into position, then started hitting the keys. The example he dwells on, a photograph of Landru's oven, could suggest 1947, since that year he wrote of Bluebeard (Landru) in his review of *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947). A later date is urged by the reference to television, since Bazin's first essay on TV came out in 1951. But André Malraux had already brought up TV in his "Esquisse d'un psychologie du cinema" back in 1940, and we know how important that piece was for Bazin, since he explicitly cites it in the "Ontology" essay.[3] Like Malraux he could easily have been speculating in 1940 on a phenomenon that was in the science news of the time, one that put cinema in perspective.

No matter what its date, this page shows Bazin struggling with the specificity of three technological media. Like a surveyor, he triangulates cinema's position between photography and television, and, after first isolating the valence of technological images for reality, he does so in three successive paragraphs.

1. Bazin calls the photograph a *document*, a term he underlines. In the French context, this edges him close to Georges Bataille (whose journal *Documents* featured disturbing photographs not different from the one Bazin brings up, Landru's oven that incinerated the bodies of eleven humans). The Surrealists collected and produced bizarre photographs; they may well have relished this very example.[4] Breton's 1928 *Nadja* weaves its dreamy narrative around Boiffard's unalterable photos. About the same time Dalí's obsession with "precisionism" found its best examples in photographs, as alien signs that confront us with a reality outside the human. In 1943 some of his acquaintances averred that Bazin was a practising Surrealist. Just look at the last page of the "Ontology" essay where he calls a photograph "une hallucination vrai." Sartre, who loathed surrealism, would never have countenanced this formulation that haunted Bazin's view of cinema ever after.

2. From the *document* to the *documentaire*. Bazin next imagines the photograph coming alive within an "actualité" (filmed newsreel) whose subject expands from an object to an event or a state-of-affairs. Whereas Sartre concentrated on the relation of the *analogon* to the image-consciousness it automatically provokes, Bazin is more concerned with the relation of the *analogon* to the situation from which it was "captured." In Sartre's view, while every object maintains an indefinite number of relations to neighboring objects, and is in fact made up of an infinite number of elements itself, the photograph cuts the *analogon* off from these relations, fixing it as material for the imagination to play with as it wills. Bazin, on the other hand, cares that the photograph offers clues about its situation, inviting acute inspection. A film greatly enlarges this impulse since its *analogon* delivers not just one or even several objects but the relations of those objects to their spatio-temporal surround. We can scan the screen for details that the sequence may contain unbeknown even to the cinematographer ("a reflection on a damp sidewalk, the gesture of a child. Only the impassive lens, stripping its object of all those ways of seeing it . . ."). Film, as opposed to photography, "is no longer content to preserve the object enshrouded



Landru's oven

Topical Press Agency, Hulton Archive (Getty Images, 2628521).

as it were in an instant, as the bodies of insects are preserved intact out of the distant past in amber . . . Now for the first time the image of things is likewise the image of their duration." His notes on Sartre press this further when he writes: "The family photo may be the family immobilized in a here and now; but a film renders the fluidity of its space and of its time. The photo was a *document*, the film is a *documentary*." In this lapidary sentence Bazin may italicize the nouns, but I would underscore the copulae—from "was" to "is." Roland Barthes would capitalize on this remarkable, grammatical way of distinguishing between media in *La Chambre claire* (*Camera Lucida*), a book more dependent on Bazin than its author lets on, and one, by the way, whose dedication reads, "à *L'Imaginaire* de Jean-Paul Sartre." What a genealogy! For Barthes and Bazin alike, the document stands fixed, while the documentary presents its objects quivering across time. As a film unrolls, the multiple determinations of its subject emerge and fluctuate, and so does that subject's identity. "Ambiguity," a word that will shortly become crucial to Bazin, thickens the *analogon*, since a plethora of the object's relations to its situation keeps it from being stabilized or "fixed" as in a photographic bath. For Sartre the photographic document delivers Pierre to us unambiguously; for Bazin, a documentary film of Pierre may well leave us undecided about who he really is or what his value is.

3. Then, in a final twist, Bazin adds to Sartre's "Image Family" a brand new member, broadcast television, something about which he would ultimately write dozens of articles. If the imagination lifts the photographic *analogon* out of its original time for later viewing, television can be said to restore the liveness of present perception. Viewers reached by a broadcast "participate" simultaneously at one and the same event. Cinema, on the other hand, inevitably projects images that lag days, weeks, or years behind the time when they were recorded. This essential difference may have grown softer, since the institution of television increasingly replays events

CHICAGO AD
HALF PAGE

(including movies) recorded earlier. But as the sports matches, the nightly news, the Olympics, the Oscars, and other live broadcasts attest, TV is *essentially* distinct from cinema. André Bazin's philosophy of the image can be found within that distinction.

Reading his reading notes I recognize two Bazins. On the one hand stands the sunny, textbook Bazin, for whom cinema reveals reality. This is the Bazin for whom films are the monstration of the world's self-presentation, offering epiphanies to the vigilant. On the other hand, as has become increasingly evident, a darker Bazin prefigures several philosophers in the post-Sartrean French context right up to our own day (Derrida, Deleuze, Nancy, Rancière). This is the Bazin of lag and deferral ("cinema as a mirror whose tain retains the image," he would later write in anticipation of Derrida[5]), the Bazin of the off-screen and the invisible, and of whatever is not fully given, or is given ambiguously, or withdraws into itself. Television, for this Bazin, presents or simulates the way the world looks; cinema, by contrast, points to an absent reality through shadowy traces and echoes of recorded sound.

But I didn't need to interpret these notes to understand what in fact they palpably exemplify, because Sartre's *L'Imaginaire*—this particular copy in my hands—and the typed sheet buried like a mummy within it, conjure Bazin as present in his absence. They constitute—precisely and potently—a fetish.

1. *Cahiers du Cinéma* has rights to all Bazin's published writings. They hope to bring out a complete works some day.
2. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: a Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, trans. Jonathan Webber (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 23.
3. André Malraux,: "Esquisse d'un psychologie du cinéma," *Verve* 8 (1940). Translated as "Sketch for a Psychology of the Motion Picture," in Susan Langer, *Reflections on Art* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1958). In the French version of his "Ontology" article Bazin directly cites Malraux's "article de *Verve*."
4. Robin Walz, *Pulp Surrealism: Insolent Popular Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) reproduced this photo linking Landru to Aragon and to the Surrealist sensibility.
5. Louis-Georges Schwarz, "'Tain' or Bazin beyond Existentialism," lecture at Yale University, 3 December 2005.

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ABSTRACT This article includes a translation, facsimile, and analysis of a typescript fragment by Bazin, which is evidence of his engagement with Sartre's *The Imaginary*.

KEYWORDS Bazin, Sartre, Barthes, documentary, photography

"CALIFORNIA VIDEO"

The "California Video: Artists and Histories" show, curated by Glenn Phillips, opened at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles on 15 March 2008, running through 8 June. Ambitious in its scope, it features the works, all made during periods when they were based in California, of fifty-eight individual artists and collaboratives. At its portal, one first encounters John Baldessari's 1971 videotape, "*I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*." Shot on an early Portapak, the piece shows the artist simulating a school punishment by repeatedly handwriting the statement for the duration of the roll of tape. Most people glance at it, get the joke, move on. Which, reflecting the deadpan "duh" on which it pivots, is about right. Seasoned viewers, on the other hand, may spend more time there, pondering the art-historical significance of Baldessari's translation to video of his immediately prior reflexive conceptual paintings of texts—of, for example, the words "THIS IS NOT TO BE LOOKED AT"—many of them now freshly installed at Eli Broad's new museum just across town. Or, lacking this specialist knowledge, visitors may contemplate the various forms of physicality contained in the video: the visual texture of the image itself, the awkward arrangement of the artist's forearm across the screen as he accommodates his left-handedness to his task, or the temporal effects of the simple repetition by which the performance seems simultaneously to contradict his stated intent and to imbue it with a compelling fascination.

In any case, the visitor will eventually move on to the next piece, Diana Thater's *Continuous Only* (2006). Instead of on a funky old period Sony TV set, this exists as nine large black-framed screens flat on the wall, gleaming and sexy. The imagery pans through rich, semi-tropical foliage providing an intensely sensual visuality of the kind until recently more familiar on film than on video: one recalls Stan Brakhage's "How many colors are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of 'Green?'" The unseen technology producing the images coordinates the camera-motion and the imagery, so that the whole appears to be a single huge screen somewhere behind the wall, with the monitors serving as holes through which a natural yet glamorous spectacle can be observed.

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Succinctly then, in its first two steps, the exhibition establishes persuasive parameters for an analysis of avant-garde video's historical evolution: across the thirty-five years between 1971 and 2006, low tech confronts high tech, male looks at female, a bemused but rigorous conceptualism gives way to a gorgeous conceptual vacuity, modernism is displaced by postmodernism. Such a framing would indeed have sustained a viable narrative for the whole show, but instead of relaxing into it, the exhibition immediately introduces an even wider analytic context.

The next item is a recreation of an early 1950s domestic drawing room, decorated with kitsch JFK tapestries and other memorabilia and a glorious orange shag rug, all focused on a console playing *The Eternal Frame* (1975), T. R. Uthco and the Ant Farm's re-enactment of the Kennedy assassination. Sitting on the couch, one watches the charade in all its tacky dissimulation: spectators on the grassy knoll applauding as the fake bullets hit home and Doug Michels's Jackie looking like a drag queen sprawled across the death-car's trunk. Invoking the home rather than the museum, the installation foregrounds issues the first two had subordinated: the mass-cultural uses of the television technology and the social spatiality of its reception. But no sooner have all the implications of commercial broadcast been introduced into the mix and conceptually reconstructed than the design of the exhibition again expands the critical contexts in the adjacent recreation of an installation. Bruce Nauman's *Video Surveillance Piece (Public Room, Private Room)* (1969/70) constructs a series of visual and ontological contradictions between a surveillance camera, the corresponding monitor, and the spectator's presence in the surveilled space. It too is about the spatiality of perception, but rather than opening up to politics and the public world, it is hermetically reflexive.

And so the show unfolds, each step through it revealing an expanding spiral of the multiple innovations video has engendered in its short history. Generally the arrangement moves one through examples of single-channel video produced or preserved at the Long Beach Museum of Art (whose extensive collection the Getty purchased and which forms the core of the present exhibition) and into larger, more recent and elaborate installations. Everyone's itinerary will be idiosyncratic. For me the high points spanned punk confrontationalism in the vein of Joe Rees's *Target Video 77* (c. 1977–80), a selection of early, but distinctly non-corporate music

Left: John Baldessari, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* (1971). Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York, Santa Monica, California.

Right: T. R. Uthco and Ant Farm, *The Eternal Frame (refabricated installation, 2008)* (1975) © T. R. Uthco/Ant Farm. Courtesy of the artists, San Francisco, California.

videos and the meditational sublimity of Paul Kos's *Chartres Bleu* (1983–86).

Watching Jello Biafra singing "Holiday in Cambodia" is one thing, even with the fortuitous echoes of the other Dead Kennedys in the previous room; but then to see the Mutants performing at a school for the *deaf* with a signer translating the singer and the kids signing to each other while playing air guitar is something else. But even that is aced by the Crimes, hair greased like Johnny Cash, all dressed in black police uniforms singing in the San Quentin prison yard while the gun-toting guards patrolled the barbed-wire perimeter and the muscled cons waved fliers. *Chartres Bleu*, on the other hand, is a sculptural assemblage of twenty-seven monitors that replicates one of the Gothic windows of Chartres Cathedral. Over the course of twelve minutes the glorious stained-glass colors fade to night. But as they do so, they turn into twenty-seven mirrors reflecting the work on the opposite side of the room: twenty-seven little frames of a Buddha touring the American freeways on the back of a truck (Euan Macdonald's *SCLPTR* [2003]) and next to them twenty-seven little frames of a tough-looking chick whacking weeds on an empty L.A. lot (Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn's *Whacker* [2005]).

Midway between these, there's a study lounge where all the Research Center's holdings are accessible on individual monitors. Reminiscent of the animals categorized in Borges's "Chinese Encyclopedia," available are Northern California (29 tapes), Southern California (66), Politics (25), The Body (27), California Stories (18), Signal Distortion (16), and Under Five Minutes (22). The irregular list neatly illustrates the combination of geographical, ideological, and technical considerations that the exhibition attempts to reconcile.

There are, inevitably, important omissions. That of Joan Logue results in the loss of the L.A. origins of video portraiture. The extensive video work of Harry Gamboa Jr. (omitted) is surely more significant than that of the Harrys Kipper (featured prominently). And the omission of all the work produced by the first and most important Asian American community arts organization, L.A.'s Visual Communications reflects an aestheticism (and an ethno-centricism) that skews the medium's historical usages. Omissions such as these are not simply incidental, but also the other side of a missing curatorial decisiveness, especially around issues of value, aesthetic, historical, political, length ("under five minutes"), or however it could be asserted or clarified. By being on the one hand indiscriminately ecumenical and on the other extremely partial, the montage of the Getty's attractions loses these questions in a giddy euphoria. Instead of analysis, it creates a circus-like exhilaration. On one of the days I visited, this was intensified by a Family Festival for Latina/o schoolchildren hosted by the Getty. As Oaxacan music filtered into the show, gaggles of excited teenagers were, perhaps for the first time, discovering the pleasures of gallery art.

I did not always agree with the curatorial decisions of "California Video," but there is no question that the show works admirably and compellingly as a smorgasbord, even a cornucopia. I hope the Getty will build on this success and mount something similar for the even more important (and more neglected) history of avant-garde film in California.

DAVID E. JAMES's most recent book is *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2005).

UNAMUSED AT ABERCROMBIE & FITCH

Improv Everywhere, the New York-based neo-situationist group founded by actor Charlie Todd, turns the city into a performance space. Todd and his performer friends—they prefer to be called "agents"—first set out to cause "scenes of chaos and joy in public places" (as their mission statement puts it) just before 9/11. Shortly afterwards, Todd posed as the disciple of a genuine Union Square crackpot. ("After everything that's been going on," he told a passer-by, "I just feel so lost. I looked at this guy and it was clear to me that he knew exactly what he is supposed to be doing.") A later performance prompted one uninvolved observer to chide another for his surly reaction: "You're forgetting what happened on September 11th! Lighten up!" The early ventures were recorded only through written accounts posted on the group's website, improveverywhere.com, which also invites commentary. (The site furthermore serves a recruiting function. Before long, anyone who asked to be informed about Improv Everywhere's next mission could become an agent simply by turning up.) But in 2002, the group started posting videos too. Many are also uploaded to YouTube and Revver, and one, "Frozen Grand Central," has been viewed more than ten million times.

The subway was identified early on as an ideal site for the group's activities: an enclosed public space with a captive audience. One early prank involved two agents pretending to be long-lost brothers. The online report asked: "Did those riding the train believe that they had just witnessed a real reunion? Yes. Is that the point? No. The train was taken from its normal overcrowded and irritated state to an intriguing scene that . . . will always be a great story for those who witnessed it." Other train-based missions followed—a surprise birthday party, a marriage proposal, bingo games—but the most bountiful was the first mission recorded on video, which took place in January 2002. In "No Pants," seven agents took a ride on the subway without their trousers (though with underwear, shoes, and socks), and without overtly acknowledging their unusual dress. The addition of a moving-image record of the action adds a significant dimension to the write-up: the sight of a young female passenger's wariness giving way to barely stifled laughter seems to be an apt proof of the group's intended claims. (The hands-to-mouth, eyes-widening moment is the "money shot" of the video prank.) Initially attracting the disapproving attention of the police, the event has become an annual institution. This year's outing involved almost 2,000 half-clothed participants and was policed much like a parade.

Some of the most notable and edgy projects have occurred in stores. In one, all thirty-nine listening posts at a Virgin Megastore were occupied by agents who launched into a synchronized dance routine; another, "Operation Best Buy," saw dozens of agents separately entering a Best Buy electronics store wearing approximations of the staff uniform of blue polo shirt and chinos. These co-options of commercial space seem to have had genuinely disruptive results: one agent involved in the Megastore mission reported that, as the participants stood stock still before beginning to dance, "A man turned to his wife and instructed her to go find their daughter and make sure she was 'ok'. Some people seemed genuinely scared at the prospects of what might happen next." The online video has a certain eeriness as the participants silently stand in regimented stillness then start to move in sync. In "Look Up More," dozens of agents took up position in the windows of a multi-storey shopping space facing onto Union Square and danced for the crowds below; in "No Shirts," dozens of topless male agents entered an Abercrombie & Fitch clothing store, at whose entrance a shirtless male model functioned as a greeter. Both missions were ended by security staff.

Improv Everywhere offers no theoretical apparatus for its work, appealing only to a utopian idea of pleasant diversion. The expeditions can seem clumsy when aping overtly political tropes, such as placard-waving demonstrations. But missions like the ones mentioned above, as documented with increasing sophistication by the group's own videographers, play teasing, unsettling games with the orderliness of retail environments, exposing brand-identity tyrannies and groupthink. The threats of violence from Abercrombie & Fitch employees in particular add weight to an implicit critique of the quasi-fascistic elements of the store's fetishistic youth aesthetic. Comparably, several of the socially transgressive missions have ended in police intervention and even arrest, despite the absence of any criminality. But the critique remains implicit, and moreover the group's videos hint at its own gang mentality: one "Look Up More" agent admits the exercise "reminded me a little of *Fight Club*."

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Bystanders laugh then security gets involved

Courtesy improveverywhere.com ("No Shirts").

Despite its avowed intent not to cause distress to "strangers," as non-agents are called, several Improv Everywhere actions have prompted criticism on the website's talkback boards and beyond. In one, an unsuspecting cabbie was led to believe he had brought two lovers together in the manner of a romantic comedy; although most visitors applauded the prank, one called it "wrong like happiness from Soma." Especially problematic were the missions "Ted's Birthday" and "Best Gig Ever." In the latter, thirty-five agents showed up to a Sunday night concert by a little-known band, Ghosts of Pasha (there were three other audience members in attendance). The agents had memorized songs from the band's website, made T-shirts featuring their logo, and greeted them like gods. Some respondents found the enterprise touching and amusing; others thought it cruel and exploitative. ("Part of me feels like you bought someone a hooker and here he thinks he's doing really well, it's all a big illusion," one commenter wrote.) Such cases are notable for the lively, engaged, and, by the standards of online discourse, relatively respectful exchange of opinions that they prompt. "Best Gig Ever" is also interesting, however, for its casting of a group of performers in the role of an audience, making unwitting straight men of the people on stage—a paradoxical dynamic that aptly reflects the layered reflexivity not only of the group's own relationship with its web visitors, but of the contemporary web experience in general.

Other ideas toy pleasingly with strangers' perception of time in ways that arguably reflect the control over sequence and duration enjoyed by web users. "The Moebius" turned a branch of Starbucks into a kind of miniature *Groundhog Day*, with several agents enacting a five-minute routine—these two quarrel, this one spills his drink, then that one's boombox plays "Shiny Happy People"—and repeating it over and over for an hour. Another mission saw agents moving through a hardware store in slow motion. Then there was the Grand Central Station freeze, a kind of live version of the interrupted-buffering effect familiar to any online video user. The video of that event is conspicuously slick because it was shot as part of a pilot for an Improv Everywhere TV show, which was not picked up. Other segments are also viewable online, and have provoked criticism from longtime admirers. One commenter compared them to a "mediocre hidden camera show . . . absolutely bastardized." The move away from the handheld, low-resolution imagery of the clandestine shoots to network broadcast standards involves the loss of the delicate, sophisticated networking that links agents, website visitors, and strangers. Improv Everywhere is founded, after all, on the concept of agency—an arena in which the practices of online video production and consumption will outshine passive television-watching every time.

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TEEMING LIFE

Somewhere between *Several Friends* (1969) and today, Charles Burnett's work speeds up. His early films—preeminently *Killer of Sheep* (1977), now finally available in a superb DVD reconstruction from Milestone—have a loose-limbed feel. The assiduous description of ordinary lives, spacious and leisurely, in intercrossed vignettes, takes precedence over straight-ahead narrative hooks and resolutions. However, by the time of his acclaimed copland drama, *The Glass Shield* (1994), or his underrated family melodrama assignment for Oprah Winfrey Productions, *The Wedding* (1998), everything has become much faster. A hyper-economic approach to storytelling gives rise to a breakneck speed that is as exhilarating as it can be deliberately disorienting. A plot question left lingering at the end of one scene is swiftly answered in the next, with the sound impatiently anticipating the image. (This 1970s affectation is detested by most contemporary filmmakers, but Burnett is a true poet of the audio lead-in.) Tense exchanges between characters are reduced to a shot and a counter-shot (sometimes not even that much), a couple of lines (at best) of dialogue, or simply a telling look. More than anything, Burnett has an eye for gestures that are surprising, eloquent, forceful—which is why the slow-dance scene between the barechested but strangely alienated San (Henry G. Sanders) and his wife (Kaycee Moore), trembling with amorous emotion, is the most memorable moment in *Killer of Sheep*. The attentiveness to physical gesture—the casual posture, the defensive hand or arm reflex, the instinctual full-body movement of flight or embrace (see them all, in an astonishingly swift cycle, in the devastating final scene of *The Glass Shield*)—remains the same, whether Burnett is batting the storyline slow or fast.

Rhythm, gesture, time, space: such talk of cinematic form does not always leap to the forefront of the minds of even his most fervent commentators. Because so much of Burnett's work, for so long, has stayed invisible and inaccessible, there has always been a perceived need to return to square one in order to plead his case, to set right the prevailing cultural inquities, and often in a polemical way: Burnett the great unknown black American filmmaker, better than Spike Lee, his work a more authentic vision of his culture than either *Shaft* (1971) or *Barbershop* (2002), an eternal radical pushed to the margins. (It will be intriguing to see whether his unofficial outsider status survives the release of his next project, *Red Soil*, which features Laurence Fishburne and Mykelti Williamson.) Most often, Burnett is pegged—without much further probing—as a realist, or more tonily a neo-realist. (The designation appears yet once more in Armond White's combative notes to the Milestone edition.) Indeed a glimpse at his recent short, *Quiet as Kept* (2007), on the *Killer of Sheep* DVD—a hilarious five-and-a half-minute sketch in which the members of a family argue over whether *Star Wars (1977)*, *Superfly* (1972), or *The Cosby Show* is the most suitable viewing for a black adolescent—quickly arouses a close comparison with Mike Leigh's quirky, slice-of-life "five-minute movies" made for U.K. television in the 1980s.

Calling Burnett's work realist is a form of nebulous praise that does little to elucidate these marvelous films. I inadvertently prized open what I think is one of the secrets of *Killer of Sheep* by re-watching parts of it in fast motion. I forgot which scene I was searching for, and instead began to notice how Burnett structures scenes, or groups of scenes, around particular, seemingly neutral objects. Burnett is an artist of the life of fixtures, small loci, or transition-points—a car, a front porch. His characters teem in, out, through, and around these special points, subject to a dozen tiny but forceful determinations: the time of day (leaving for work or returning home), each person's particular physical manner, and the intersubjective dynamics of friends or family. I think Deleuze would have responded to this element of *Killer of Sheep*, for it is congruent with the ideas in his books on cinema. Burnett's cinematic poetry arises from a hundred small "sensory-motor disconnections" (to use Deleuze's phrase) of every damn day, with its gaps and dislocations (the car that won't start, the home appliance that won't work), from which a sad but resilient emotion flows . . .

The other feature in the Milestone set (another volume of Burnett's work will hopefully follow in future) is *My Brother's Wedding* (1983), which has received far less attention than *Killer of Sheep*, but is almost as interesting. Particularly in that—like the Criterion presentation of John Cassavetes' *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976)—it comes in two very different edits, the original of 1983 and the recut

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of 2007. There is a full thirty-seven minutes' variation in running time—the new version is not only shorter and tighter (another sign of Burnett's speeding-up) but, at certain points, digitally reframed: it is fascinating to judge what Burnett thought was worth removing from certain images to literally focus or focalize his point better (as in the post-coital moment which now excludes the overly vulgar comic touch of another guy's legs as he stands next to the hurried lovers). *My Brother's Wedding* does not have the elegaic, tragic air of *Killer of Sheep*, but it does have the same teeming life. With its proud use of nonprofessional actors and its loopy dialogue —"He's got the neuralgia. I guess that means he wants me to send him some money"—I found myself free-associating to the 1980s collaborations between Paul Morrissey and playwright Alan Bowne, such as *Forty Deuce* (1982) and *Mixed Blood* (1985).

Since it is something of a comedy (but with disturbing, surprising swerves), *My Brother's Wedding* has a curious (and perhaps unintended) relation both to films of the 1970s *Car Wash* ilk and to Ice Cube's current *Friday* franchise. The central plot premise—the friendship between Pierce (Everett Silas), a passive guy who still works for his folks, and the flakey, unpredictable, uncontrollable Soldier (Ronnie Bell)—furthermore evokes the male relationship in Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (1973). This lateral connection between Burnett and 1970s American cinema is extended by the haunting, elliptical short, *The Horse* (1973), which might almost be an outtake from Terrence Malick's contemporaneous *Badlands*.

But Burnett's style—in these early years, as well as in shorts like *Quiet as Kept* and the superb *When It Rains* (1986)—is more profoundly musical than even Scorsese's or Malick's. This is another aspect of Burnett's work that deserves close attention: the superbly placed snatches of music, the mixing of that music with the rhythms, intonations, and cadences of the spoken words, the way that the scenes seem to be shaped to the music, rather than (as is usual) vice versa. Indeed, when we look again closely at that famous dance scene in *Killer of Sheep* we notice, alongside the exactness and intensity of the human gestures, how music washes in and out of the tableau, like the ebb and flow of life itself: strangely but beautifully, when the first song is over, another begins, after the bodies have parted, doubling the sadness and wisdom of the scene.

In work from his forthcoming magnum opus, *The Body of Cinema*, presented at Princeton in April 2008, Raymond Bellour has tried to define the peculiar emotion that emanates from special moments of film, and he emphasizes, more than even in his stricter semiotic days of textual analysis, the shot as the cinematic unit par excellence. The shot, he argues, contains, marshals, and sends in various directions the emotions that are created and sustained by the smallest, frame-by-frame movements in cinema: the beating wing of a bird, the splutter of a car engine, the discontinuous landscape seen through a train window, as well as all the movements and gestures of the human body. It's at that level, finally, that we will come to appreciate the great artistry of Charles Burnett.

More than realism

Top: *Killer of Sheep.* Bottom: *My Brother's Wedding.* Courtesy Milestone.

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DVD DATA *Killer of Sheep: The Charles Burnett Collection.* Director: Charles Burnett. © Charles Burnett. Publisher: Milestone Cinematheque. $39.95, 2 discs.

BONNIE AND *PIERROT*

A young cinephile I know sat me down with him to watch two new DVD releases: *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and *Pierrot le fou* (1965). As he'd apprised me, the films were curiously related. Not only had the writers of *Bonnie*, David Newman and Robert Benton, set out to emulate the sensibility of French New Wave films; their screenplay proved so congenial to the sources of its inspiration that an admiring François Truffaut passed it on to an amenable Jean-Luc Godard, who entered negotiations to film it. These of course weren't successful, but when Newman and Benton later mused—sometimes with Godard himself—on what, as they put it, "*Bonnie and Clyde* might have been had he directed it," they imagined it would have been "not unlike *Pierrot le fou*," Godard's film about another couple on the run made only a year after the *Bonnie* deal fell through. Such information, like the ebullient young man who imparted it, charmed me considerably: could the proposed double feature fail to stimulate? For all our difference of age and sensibility, I too was a cinephile, and because of that same difference, I had confidence in us as a team; once we had warmed up with the child's play of finding Godard's example in *Bonnie*, we would easily advance to the trickier fun of spotting traces of *Bonnie*'s influence on *Pierrot*, a film that preceded it by two years. And then, who knew?

But somehow, for so suggestive a pairing, we weren't after all a good pair. To begin with, my companion, though a mere fledgling, displayed a near-perfect command of *Bonnie*, not only its every scene and image, but even its making, marketing, and critical reception; and he expatiated on everything from the oral sex to Pauline Kael with the same stultifying effect on me as the self-adoring infomercials that Warner Bros., calling them "documentaries," had put on a separate disc. Without question, *Bonnie* was still all he remembered from the last and only time he saw it, but that very fact reduced my own viewing of it to no *more* than he remembered; I assented to his every point, engaged with none. The awkwardness between us only increased when we moved on to *Pierrot*. For now, continuing to pervert the conversational obligation to "take turns," but in the opposite way, he fell into a sort of abashed silence, which he maintained unbroken throughout the film's most extraordinary moments; despite his boast to have first caught *Pierrot* at a small *cinéma d'essai* in the Latin Quarter, I began to wonder whether he had *ever* seen this film. It was, in any case, impossible to doubt that he was deferentially waiting for *me* to take the lead here, as he had just done with *Bonnie*. But I couldn't, being rather in need of some assistance myself; and if I had nothing to add to his garrulity before, I had nothing to put forward now in our deadeningly silent home theater.

As the young man was none other than myself, or rather the earlier self that I had been when I saw these films in the 1960s, it was troubling that he should have turned out to be so unsatisfactory. As Brice Parain told Anna Karina in *My Life to Live* (1962), "When you're twenty, you don't know. . . . To be completely at one with what you love, you need maturity." This had been a convenient assumption as much for the young man whom it first allowed to watch art films in untroubled incomprehension as for his middle-aged successor whom it subsequently authorized to find consolation for grizzled hair in a well-judging head. But this time around, things had fallen out to the exact contrary: my callow youth proved surprisingly adequate to the task of understanding *Bonnie*, whereas my wise ripeness kept me gaga when it came to getting *Pierrot*. Had I waited forty years to learn that, in the first case, I *did* know at twenty, and that, in the second, I would *never* know? By virtue of being either too good or too faulty, my memory had cruelly stripped both films of depth. With *Bonnie*, it turned up little more than the rote memorization of a student good at cramming; and with *Pierrot*, it had sagged into out-and-out amnesia, the lapse of a dotard who was now forgetting his keys, his glasses, everything. Nothing could have been less Proustian than this strange commemorative experience that, in its very flatness, didn't feel like "experience" at all; instead, it had deprived me of a sense of my own depth along with the films'. Crowded out between two forms of mental superficiality—all-knowing adolescence and mindless senility—I had lost the very possibility of the just-right subjectivity (psychologically deep, aesthetically confirmed, erotically complete) that, under the name of maturity, Parain had promised me.

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My failure to see in *Bonnie* anything I hadn't seen in 1967 may be recast in less personal terms, as an effect of the film's own antivisual bias. This might seem a preposterous claim to make about a Hollywood movie that devotes obvious effort to

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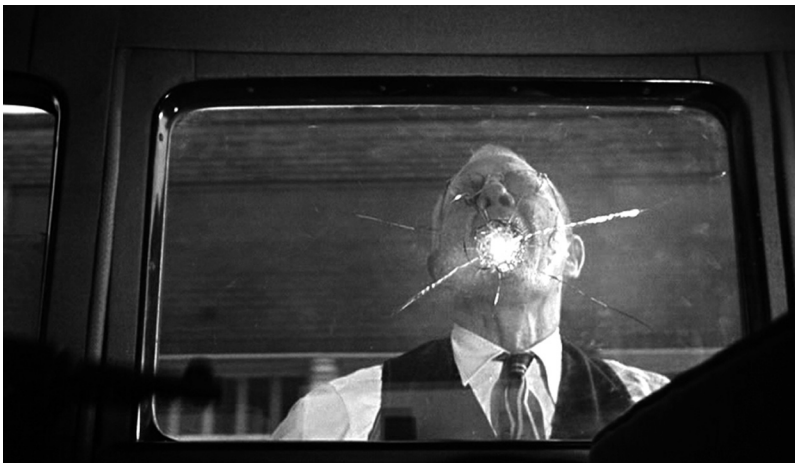

Déjà vu aesthetics

Top left: *Gun Crazy.* © 1949 Pioneer Pictures Corporation. DVD: Warner Home Video. Top right: *Potemkin.* DVD: Kino International. Bottom: *Bonnie and Clyde.* © 1967 Warner Bros., Seven Arts Inc., Tatira Hiller Productions. DVD: Warner Home Video.

being easy on the eyes: the good looks of Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty, the 1930s costumes and locations, Arthur Penn's theatrical framings—these things have been plainly designed to procure us immediate visual pleasure, and they do. But such pleasure is "obvious" in the root sense as well: it is *in the way*, at once obstructive and preemptive. If we are instantly gratified in remarking *Bonnie*'s many notable "sights," that is because (albeit more or less unconsciously) we instantly *recognize* them; hence, no sooner do we lay eyes on them than we essentially stop seeing them. Our pleasure is a sort of relief at being spared the strain, the intensity, the exorbitance inherent in visual excitation, and at finding that excitation pacified under the sedation of the déjà vu. *Bonnie* is packed solid, so to speak, with familiar icons, from pictures of FDR to Philip Morris ads; and the better to make its images always-already reminiscent, it frequently resorts to "antiquing" techniques, introducing its protagonists in black-and-white snapshots, or shooting Bonnie's family reunion through hazy window screen.

During one of the infomercials, Morgan Fairchild says of the faces in that reunion: "they look just like they're right out of a *Grapes of Wrath* 1932 photograph." This is pure eye-wash, but as such it is telling: what matters is that the déjà vu be *easily* recognized, not accurately; and indeed, the more vaguely we remember the icons of Grant Wood, Norman Rockwell, Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, John Ford, or John Steinbeck, the more effectively the film drains from them the blood to pump life into its phantom replications. Everything looks "just like it's right out of" something we can't quite name, but it would decidedly spoil the effect if an improved memory were to recall that Bonnie's trend-setting beret has been lifted from Peggy Cummins in *Gun Crazy*

(1949), or that what is perhaps the film's most admired image—of a bank clerk seen through a car window as Clyde is shooting him—is modeled on an image from *Potemkin* (1925). As if to forestall some such suggestion that *Bonnie* were anything other than original, its collaborators concur in recalling a magical propitious creativity. Here is the costume designer Theadora van Runkle on her inspiration: "the minute I read the first page [of the script] . . . I knew, I saw everything." And here is Dunaway on the result: "The minute I saw it, I knew this was right." We too enjoy this amazing speed and range of vision in our humble capacity as *Bonnie*'s spectators: having seen everything before, we see it again "at once" and in its obvious "rightness."

There is a single exception to the film's practice of visual habituation, only one thing that induces rapid movement in our icon-glazed eyes. This is Dede Allen's editing, whose irregular hiccups keep breaking the spell of Penn's immobilizing tableaus and silhouettes with, at least for a while, some of the recklessly destructive energy of the protagonists themselves. Allen's work was called iconoclastic and it literally remains so, shattering the images by breaking up the tranquil, predictable flow required for their coalescence. This New Wave style of editing would soon become no more French than the baguettes on which, during the same period of assimilation, we were learning to make turkey sandwiches; but in *Bonnie*, at least, the contradiction it introduces is so serious as to require a full-on spectacle of resolution. In the same moment that the narrative tension comes to catharsis with Bonnie and Clyde's violent death, the formal antagonism is being resolved in the film's most spectacular—and transmissible—stylistic innovation: violence in slow motion. This device, which moralizing critics once censured for reveling in the violence, in fact does the very opposite; it abandons the iconoclasm of montage for a smoother, almost velvety transition between images, images that, in pointed contrast to the blood being splattered in them, now seem to be congealing. Bonnie is ridden with bleeding holes while *Bonnie* lyrically affirms its visual consolidation. The quick, staccato rhythm now belongs only to the feds' guns as the film's own pace is slowed down into a picture-pretty memento of what it had been; the editing has got "antiqued" along with everything else. *Bonnie*'s innovation thus consummates the film's very retro-ness, as a movie made in full anticipation of the nostalgia that it might one day occasion and is actually occasioning from the start. "You will remember *Bonnie and Clyde*," the film seems to be predicting with every image, "and you will remember *how good it used to look*." But the course of time, instead of making this prophecy easier to fulfill, has made it simply impossible: "I can't; I remembered that already."

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Pierrot's heroine, called Marianne Renoir (Anna Karina), is shown standing next to a postcard of a Jean Renoir portrait, her hair done up in a somewhat similar way. But we can't possibly think that this image has just stepped out of the Renoir painting; precisely in being *comparable* to the latter, it has lost the possibility of seeming *like* it. While the mystificatory tact of allusion made Bonnie look "right" in her beret, the bald precision of reference gives this conjecturally Renoiresque image of Marianne a sharply defined inconsistency. Moreover, though many are the tricks and devices of Godard's style, they all work at the single task of making every cinematic image likewise incongruous, dissonant. A Godard image may be at odds with the music accompanying it, the dialogue spoken in it, or the quotation delivered over it; may run contrary to how narrative function and cinematic convention lead us to envision it; may diverge from the other images that it precedes, follows, includes, or imitates; may do all these things at once. But it is always a strikingly ill-suited thing. And this overall style of mismatching is itself strikingly ill suited to our attention, which, with equal abruptness, it at once summons and refuses to sustain.

By some reckonings, *Pierrot* marks the moment where Godard "goes bad," and by others, where his style, whose distinctive features had emerged long before, achieves its first fully rigorous statement. It is both these things because Godard here no longer puts up much resistance to the corrosive implications of this style for what had been his favorite subject (the romantic couple) and his favorite set of forms (the Hollywood genres). Adorable in *Breathless* (1959), irresistible in *A Woman is a Woman* (1961), "fatal" in *Contempt* (1963), the couple in *Pierrot* enjoys only the charm of the fading. A mundane way of putting Godard's famous claim that his Marianne and Ferdinand (Jean-Paul Belmondo) are "the last romantic couple" is to say that they are, from the very beginning, at the end of the line, where all their effort to *be* the romantic couple is balked or unproductive. They are never seen even to accomplish the copulation that is the couple's crown in *Bonnie*, much less to hold together on any ideal or spiritual plane. More tiresome than poignant, their failing condition persists until the day they die—and even then, unlike every other couple on the run, they don't die together. *Pierrot*'s couple runs not like *Bonnie*'s, to its apotheosis in legend, but only like a stocking, as part of its own unraveling. The story of course unravels with it, on the application of the same inconsistency principle. "I didn't prethink it," Godard rather proudly told *Cahiers du cinéma*; "it was a completely spontaneous film," written, edited, mixed as he went along. We don't doubt his sincerity here, but nei-

"In one word, emotions."

Pierrot le fou. © 1965 Studio Canal Image, Société Nouvelle de Cinématographique, Dino de Laurentiis Cinematographica SPA (Rome). DVD: Criterion Collection.

ther do we appreciate the film's perfunctory and confusing narrative construction. Released from the thrall of Couple and Genre, *Pierrot* deprives us of conventional mnemonics to remember it by.

Yet the profoundly unmemorable freshness of *Pierrot* derives from more than just these deficiencies of content and form. Consider what Samuel Fuller, playing himself, says early on when Ferdinand asks him just what exactly cinema is: "A film is like a battleground. It's Love. Hate. Action. Violence. Death. In one word, emotions." Those who quote this one word as gospel must have, like me, forgotten ever seeing *Pierrot*, for who that had remembered could think of "emotions" as anything but bad subtitling for a film that doesn't depict or induce any? Love, hate? Between this nonchalant couple, they are hard to find, still harder to feel. Violence, death? But these are too factitiously presented, with blood by Mondrian, to grip us; the protagonists themselves seem unfazed by the corpses dropped their way. In any case, the inscrutable Fuller, his eyes covered in dark glasses, has made the very driest case for emotions, and the burp-like brevity of even Ferdinand's response—"ah!"—seems to equate understanding with dismissal. All we see in either man is a nonplussed surface that may or may not be concealing anything deeper down. Not by chance does the only thing on which Marianne and Ferdinand ever agree prove to be this expressionless quality of the visual image, which, as they both separately claim, never reveals anything about a subject's interiority, even that it exists. In this, unlike Fuller on emotions, they are truly speaking for *Pierrot*'s maker. Devoid of expression, of desire and the affect around it, Godard's images deny us any hospitable site from which we might *imagine* them—deepen them with desire or affect of our own. They put us in the depressive position of "having eyes bigger than our stomachs," of having to keep seeing what, libidinally speaking, we can't take in. Existing only in an imaginary *sostenuto* that Godard never gives, emotion is precisely what his cinema will not let us visualize.

Take, for example, from chapter 17, the long, slow pan that begins following Ferdinand as he walks desultorily along the railway tracks. We hear a train whistle; he sits down between the rails. He buttons his jacket, looks up, then down. We hear another, longer whistle. The train approaches, Ferdinand gets off the tracks; it passes and he walks on. On the basis of this shot, Criterion has called chapter 17 "Despair." But this is only more bad subtitling, willfully reading "into" the shot so as to restore the melodramatic emotionality that everything about it is rendering moot. It is equally false to say, as does Peter Whitehead in the screenplay's English translation, that Ferdinand "staggers up" "at the last minute" and "just escapes" being hit by the train. Much as the equanimity with which Ferdinand installs himself on the tracks indicates

The horn of the bull

Pierrot le fou. © 1965 Studio Canal Image, Société Nouvelle de Cinématographique, Dino de Laurentiis Cinematographica SPA (Rome). DVD: Criterion Collection.

less despair than a lightly worn apathy, so the unpanicked ease with which he gets up and off them suggests that his putative suicide attempt is no more than an idle game he perhaps already knows how to play. His disconsolate words ("ah, what a terrible five o'clock in the afternoon! The blood, I don't want to see it") are lines from a famous elegy by García Lorca for Ignacio Sanchez Mejías, a bullfighter fatally gored in the ring; but the *corrida* is a self-canceling signifier: along with the ennobled ghost of Mejías, it calls up the pop reference to Disney's silly cartoon bull, also called Ferdinand and remarkable for sitting down. At all events, the borrowed verses submit to the same erratic treatment as any other citation in Godard, first repeated, then inverted, finally cut off in medias res—right after the "ah," in fact, as if the plug had been pulled on the audio—death by technological failure—or as if we were again hearing Ferdinand's curtly non-absorptive response to Fuller on emotions.

As early as "The Perils of Pauline," fiction cinema has loved elaborating the fearful danger of being run over by a train; but Godard seems to evoke this classic thrilling situation only to have us observe his methodically cool rendering of it. He avoids the usual sympathetic close-ups and suspenseful cross-cutting; he even, for once in *Pierrot*, abates the assault of primary colors, as if unwilling to risk, in such a context, hitchhiking on their visual intensity. In the most perverse touch of all, he entrusts the process of glaciation to a long crane shot, the very shot that he has inherited from Mizoguchi and Hitchcock as the privileged vessel of sustained emotion. Now, no longer justifying its movement in the character's literal and emotional rush, which in any case is lacking here, the camera moves as desultorily as does Ferdinand. There could hardly be a blunter negation of the cinema of emotions, or a more thorough abolition of its sense of dramatic event. If Ferdinand had died here, would much feel changed? His corpse would only lie there in its pool of red paint like the others before it; at best it might prompt us to repeat what would have become his last word: that very unsatisfactory "ah." What would happen, in other words, is not very different from what does happen at the end of *Pierrot*, when Ferdinand wants to blow himself up, changes his mind, but then blows up anyway: "I see" is all the response we can muster.

But suppose that Godard were imaging here emotion of a different sort from the imaginary emotions of a story. I have just said that the absence of parallel montage in the treatment is a refusal to develop the emotion—call it "a fear of death"—conventionally implied in the fictional situation; but it may be doing something else besides. Think how much André Bazin admired the shot in *Where No Vultures Fly* (1951) where a child who has picked up a lion cub is

shown in the same frame with, in one direction, the lioness in search of that cub and, in the other, the parents in search of that child. This single frame, Bazin affirms, "in which trickery is out of the question," puts the characters in a real situation and gives the story the authenticity of a real event; as such, it "carries us at once to the heights of cinematographic emotion." In Godard's shot, likewise "without trickery," one sees that there must have been a possibility—surely minimized, but nonetheless irremovably genuine—that Belmondo would be run over by the train. Godard no doubt trusted his star, whose athleticism is on triumphant display throughout *Pierrot*, to decamp on cue, but it is startling to imagine—no, *not* to imagine, that is the point, but simply to *see*—the deadly, vital risk that must have been taken. Yet whereas, for Bazin, such "cinematic emotion" serves to legitimate and even magnify the imaginary narrative emotions by grounding them in bona fide reality, in Godard here, the cinematic emotion neither reinforces ordinary emotion, nor feels anything like it. For if the film-*story* always unfolds in the present tense, the film-*making*, by the time we see any of it on screen, is always over; *Pierrot*'s shot simultaneously informs us that, while Ferdinand may be in danger, Belmondo can only *have been* so. What the strange and disorienting absence of intensity in his performance here makes us confront is the dispiriting weirdness of cinematic emotion. At this moment of real danger, we are at last in the presence of some vestige of "real emotion," but it is as if we have—as we always will—come upon it too late to appropriate it, to feel *with* it. No wonder *Pierrot* is unmemorable: how can we remember an emotion about which we know nothing but that it must have taken place?

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DVD DATA *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967). Director: Arthur Penn. © 1967 Warner Bros., Seven Arts Inc., Tatira Hiller Productions. Publisher: Warner Home Video, 2008. $20.98, 2 discs (special edition).

Pierrot le fou (1965). Director: Jean-Luc Godard. © 1965 Studio Canal Image, Société Nouvelle de Cinématographique, Dino de Laurentiis Cinematographica SPA (Rome). Publisher: Criterion Collection, 2007. $39.95, 2 discs.

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HALF PAGE

WHAT MAKES A "TV MILESTONE"?

JANET MCCABE

With a strong emphasis on American television, Wayne State University Press's "TV Milestones" series of short monographs, edited by Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski, is successfully aimed at both an academic and general readership. Each volume focuses on a particular show, runs to approximately 30,000 words, and includes a complete videography. Only programs that have completed their run qualify for inclusion. Offering a "comprehensive account of a particular television show" (to quote the marketing blurb), each book places that program "in the context of the history of television and broader cultural history." Several start (and one ends) with reminiscences, and this personal framing—of ownership, of locating oneself in a specific cultural/historical past—adds nuance to the best of the titles, proving that to write about popular culture is also to participate in it.

The first five volumes—*Disney TV*, *The Rifleman*, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, *Perry Mason*, and *Bewitched*—primarily deal with shows from the first era of television, a period strongly associated with network television, which aimed to reach a mass audience with its inclusive, family-orientated programming, preferring to alienate as few people as possible. The era starts in the 1950s, consolidates in the 1960s, and is gradually replaced in the 1970s by another defined by satellite and cable-distribution systems, by the remote control, and VCRs. Reading these five titles together, a concise yet vibrant history emerges of a key stage in the industry's evolution.

But what exactly defines a milestone show? Creativity? Originality? Innovation? Longevity? No easy answer emerges. Each author offers a different, distinct definition, allowing it to emerge through rigorous analysis of narrative and visual principles as well as discussion of the show's contribution to history, culture, and television art.

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The series begins with *Disney TV*. A surprising choice maybe, but what emerges is a fascinating account of how Disney's move into television blazed a trail and provided a model through its long-running and influential series "to become a landmark of the early television era" (xii). Early in the 1950s, with the small film studio looking to expand its operations (Walt Disney looked to television to promote his studio's agenda and help fund his dream to create a theme park), Disney signed a lucrative agreement with ABC to produce regular programming. The company thus "positioned itself as a reliable source of quality programming" (xviii), providing a blueprint for how the American film industry might reinvent itself as a supplier of content for the fledging medium. Premiering in 1954, *Disneyland* (which had various title changes until its cancellation in 1990) was the sort of family-friendly fare most prized by early television, and helped determine a dominant form—the episodic series.

According to J. P. Telotte, the significance of Disney TV was its impact on the developing shape of the television industry. This history describes how Disney introduced color in 1961, embracing the new technology and helping its new home NBC define itself as the leader in color broadcasting; how it launched the Disney Channel in 1983, anticipating the revolution in digital and satellite services; and how it later purchased ABC. It also charts how Disney symbiotically combined product and marketing, public education and mass entertainment. Individual chapters develop these points further, investigating, for example, how its Davy Crockett series precipitated a national craze, and how its programs on space—*Man in Space* (1955), *Man on the Moon* (1955), *Mars and Beyond* (1957)—fueled interest in exploration and rocketry as it prepared "American imaginations for the 'real thing'" (45). Deftly demonstrated by Telotte is less the emergence of Disney as a media power—its synthesis between entertainment and marketing, its technological achievements, the Disneyification of American history and culture—than how

the company profoundly shaped media culture and played "a central role in our increasingly mediated lives" (91).

Christopher Sharrett cites "innovation" as the reason for selecting *The Rifleman* as his topic. This Western about "a single-parent family struggling for survival in 1880s New Mexico" (1), which held steady in its time slot on ABC for five years (1958–63), belongs, argues Sharrett, to an era defined by Cold War propaganda, social conservatism, and a culture of "selling free enterprise" (5). But it would be wrong to suggest that *The Rifleman* merely promoted conformism. Sharrett begins with an examination of how the series, like Disney TV, involved collaboration between Hollywood and television. Legendary film director Sam Peckinpah, for example, played a central role in the show's inception and directed several episodes before departing over disputes on representing violence. Yet his artistry left an indelible mark on the show, "including a pervasive sense of melancholy and an often savage violence" (31).

Each author offers a different, distinct definition, allowing it to emerge through rigorous analysis of narrative and visual principles as well as discussion of the show's contribution to history, culture, and television art.

Where the strength of this title lies is in Sharrett's shrewd political reading of the series. Deconstructing the Western hero, Lucas McCain (Chuck Connors)—rancher, widower, frontiersman—analyzing paternal authorities as well as racial and gender politics, evaluating violence and the gunfighter as fetish, and finishing with an intimate portray of his own relationship with his father, he offers an astute, and often moving, study of shifts in post-war U.S. masculinity and "the uninterrogated narrative of fatherhood and the fathering of America" (110).

And now for something completely different . . .

Marcia Landy calls *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, the BBC comedy series that ran from 1969–74, an example of "the creative potential of television" (2). Situating the show in the context of a changing British culture and the shifting character of the BBC in the late 1960s, Landy persuasively suggests how the series belongs to, but also made visible, a historical, social and cultural "moment of transition" (15). She argues that the series truly broke new ground as it strained the limits of language, especially the television vernacular, to overturn convention, thus "making it possible to view the world differently" (87).

Locating new forms as it "played on the absurdity and abuses in language, social institutions, and media" (30), *Monty Python* pushed the boundaries of censorship and good taste. Anti-authoritarian, but not political, Python humor, contends Landy, found a receptive audience as it "crossed over and challenged traditional borders of class and gender" (16). It mocked the establishment and dominant institutions like the Church, ridiculed sexual norms, and even critiqued the televisual form. Producing one of the strongest titles in the series, Landy delivers a critically insightful and sophisticated take on a truly *sui generis* show. As instructive as it is highly readable, this volume successfully manages to make sense of the absurd (no easy task) and identify what made the Python humor so innovative and fresh.

Perry Mason (CBS, 1957–66), starring Raymond Burr as the eponymous hero, enjoyed "the longest tenure of any legal television drama" (2). Why was it so enduring? The answer according to Thomas Leitch lies in its "dramatic formula that varied remarkably little over its television life" (3). "The triumph of *Perry Mason* is a triumph of formula" (5), especially in narrative terms: storylines routinely involved domestic intrigue and family values under threat, with Mason restoring morality by vindicating the innocent and exposing the guilty.

Situating the series in traditions of popular detective fiction and the work of show's creator Erle Stanley Gardner, which appeared in print, film, and on the radio, Leitch relates how the series was conceived, produced, and sold as a distinct franchise. Charting the evolution of the show in terms of its formulaic structure, how those conventions defined Mason as embodying the law, the subtle shift from Gardner to Burr as the true auteur of the show, and its return as a two-hour telemovie twenty years after the series ended, the book argues that the series' milestone status lies in how *Perry Mason* "shaped a generation of Americans' attitudes toward the law" (6). The strength of this title lies with its definition of authorship in a medium where the producer is seen to prevail, as well as its analysis of the star performance. However, I felt there was a missed opportunity to consider the legacy of the show's generic and narrative formula on subsequent crime and legal television dramas such as, notably, the contemporary *CSI* franchise.

I must confess that I would not have considered *Bewitched* (1964–72) an obvious contender for milestone status. Highly enjoyable as it is, the ABC series about a witch who married a mortal and moved to the suburbs seems a very conventional sitcom. But starting by "outing" the queer subtext of *Bewitched*, Walter Metz mounts a persuasive argument to suggest that there is more to the show than meets the eye.

BOOK DATA

"TV Milestones" series. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press. General editors: Barry Keith Grant, Jeannette Sloniowski

J. P. Telotte, *Disney TV*. 2004. $14.95 paper. 140 pages.
Christopher Sharrett, *The Rifleman*. 2005. $14.95 paper. 144 pages.
Marcia Landy, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. 2005. $14.95 paper. 120 pages.
Thomas Leitch, *Perry Mason*. 2005. $14.95 paper. 144 pages.
Walter Metz, *Bewitched*. 2007. $14.95 paper. 160 pages.

Adopting Horace Newcomb's model of "cumulative narrative" (that is a "television form that stands between the traditional self-contained episodic form and the open-ended serials" [48]), Metz identifies "a typology of *Bewitched*" (3). He emphasizes episodes "in which characters from the past are brought into the present and, conversely, in which characters from the present return to the past" (2), and uses this movement to trace how representing the supernatural contributed to creating a distinct aesthetic through sound and staging. Furthermore, using the past/present–present/past typology gives Metz the opportunity to illustrate how the show "bridged an important cultural era, from the assassination of President Kennedy to the Nixon years, from civil rights struggles and the rise of second-wave feminism to free love and landing on the moon" (77). Despite taking a paternalistic approach to liberal politics, or flirting with alterative lifestyles while endorsing traditional family life, the show did engage with broader historical and cultural questions related to the politics of citizenship, gender, and race.

Contemporary television-studies scholarship is actively engaged in writing television history. These titles participate in that task and the growing library has an archival function, especially valuable in reclaiming shows, such as *The Rifleman*, which might otherwise be fading from memory. No doubt future titles will look at programs from our contemporary era, and even include landmarks from other countries, but for now the true value of these monographs for me lies in the way they struggle to define the specificity of the televisual. In striving to justify a show's landmark status, the authors interrogate what makes television distinctive—and for that reason alone these books make a vital contribution.

JANET MCCABE is co-editor of several anthologies on U.S. television in the "Reading Contemporary Television" series (I. B. Tauris), of which she is joint series editor.

MUSIC

GINETTE VINCENDEAU

Chanteuse in the City: The Realist Singer in French Film by Kelley Conway

Chanteuse in the City is a fascinating and original study of a phenomenon hitherto noted and celebrated, but rarely analyzed: that of the chanteuse, or "realist" singer in classic French cinema. The chanteuse, the female interpreter of *chanson*, is a key phenomenon in French popular music, emerging from the late nineteenth-century *café-concert* (or *caf' conc'*) with figures such as Yvette Guilbert. Its golden age was the first half of the twentieth century, when Damia and Fréhel in particular (but also, in different genres, Mistinguett and Josephine Baker) entranced live audiences and later appeared in films; its apotheosis (and swansong) came with Edith Piaf who, unlike Damia and Fréhel, enjoyed international fame. This explains why Piaf, the least important figure in Conway's study given her concentration on the 1930s, adorns the cover of the book.

Conway begins by meticulously tracing the cultural history of the early chanteuses—Thérésa, Eugénie Buffet, Yvette Guilbert, the young Fréhel—as they belted out bawdy songs in the popular *caf' conc'*s. While she is attuned to differences between them, she uses them to set the main agenda of her book, "the representation of femininity, class, and the urban milieu as inscribed in the figure of the realist singer" (10). For the chanteuses throughout their heyday presented an intriguing paradox: singing of broken lives, victimization (by men, society, the rich), prostitution, and disease, they nevertheless offered a model of feminine resilience and in some cases resistance, as well as power (the power of the voice, and the economic power that comes with stardom, however short-lived). Chapter 1, "The Rise of the Unruly Woman," explores the *caf' conc'* singers. If the history of these early chanteuses is well charted in France, Conway's book brings it to a wider, English-speaking audience, at the same time as she introduces the key dimension of gender. She documents how the "unruliness" of the chanteuses greatly disturbed contemporary (male) critics, and she reads the female sexual power that they exude as allegorical of a new social mobility for women in turn-of-the-century France.

Chapter 2, "Music Hall Miss" is devoted to Mistinguett, the star of the new French music hall, as it moved from the small-scale, community-oriented *caf' conc'* to the English-influenced, large-scale, spectacular music hall. By the time

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Chapter 2, "Music Hall Miss" is devoted to Mistinguett, the star of the new French music hall, as it moved from the small-scale, community-oriented *caf' conc'* to the English-influenced, large-scale, spectacular music hall. By the time

sound cinema came, Mistinguett was a huge star of the stage, yet her mature age and the limited means of the French film industry meant that she only made one sound film, the disappointing *Rigolboche* (1936).

The centerpiece of Conway's research is the third and longest chapter, "Voices From the Past," in which she looks in great detail at the nostalgic chanteuse in several key 1930s films—archetypally Fréhel in *Pépé le Moko* (1937), in which the aged, overweight, and haggard singer, as she listens to a recording of her own earlier performance, poignantly evokes loss and yearning for youth—both hers and that of Pépé (Jean Gabin). This is where the book comes into its own. Not only do the films include some of the greatest of the period, but the chapter vindicates Conway's project. The focus on the *chanteuses* brings coherence and fresh insight into 1930s French filmmaking, gender, and cultural history. Conway discusses films that range from the canonical (*Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* [1936], *Pépé le Moko*) to inspired works which are normally neglected (*Coeur de Lilas* [1932], *Prison de femmes* [1938], *L'Entraîneuse* [1940]). The chapter also best demonstrates Conway's deft combination of wide-ranging contextual work with extremely fine textual analysis. In this respect, while all the analyses are excellent, I would pinpoint that of *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* where Conway's dissection of the song performed by Florelle, who plays Valentine, the laundry boss, manages to bring new perspectives on this much-debated film.

In microcosm, the analysis of *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* performs what the book does at large: shifting the spotlight from representations of the working class in French urban dramas as largely male, to a minority yet persistent female presence; as she says, "*Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* . . . emphasizes that women have been victimized doubly—through inequities related to both class and sexuality" (123). Conway continues in similar vein in chapter 4 (with Josephine Baker in *Zouzou* [1934], though strangely enough not in *Princesse Tam-Tam* [1935], and less well-known films like *Faubourg Montmartre* [1931], *Paris-Béguin* [1931], and *Le Bonheur* [1934]). Chapter 5, "Violent Spectatorship," brings the theme of the symbolic "threat" of the chanteuse to a logical conclusion, in films where they are literally or metaphorically murdered. Although the emphasis on the mechanical reproduction of the voice (records, the cinema) makes it a logical end point, the concluding analysis of *Prix de beauté* is less convincing, largely because its heroine is played by the American star Louise Brooks, making the film both extraordinary and atypical. This is offset however by the brilliant analysis of *La Tête d'un homme* (1933), in which Damia appears as a visually fleeting yet orally dominating presence.

In this excellent book there is little to criticize: a few spelling errors in the French quotes and the occasional mistranslation of song lyrics—the perils of tackling slang in another language. And given the subject, it would have made sense to organize the filmography around the chanteuses rather than chronologically. One could also (as ever!) wish for more illustrations. These minor quibbles apart, *Chanteuse in the City* authoritatively demonstrates the importance of the realist singer in French cinema, convincingly showing that these eminently nostalgic figures also spoke of feminine progress, change, and resistance. *Chanteuse in the City* takes its place among the key works on 1930s French cinema. © 2008 Ginette Vincendeau

GINETTE VINCENDEAU is Professor of Film Studies and Director of the Film Studies Programme at King's College London, and the author of *Jean-Pierre Melville: An American in Paris* (BFI Publishing, 2003) and *La Haine* (University of Illinois Press, 2005).

BOOK DATA Kelley Conway, *Chanteuse in the City: The Realist Singer in French Film*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. $60.00 cloth; $24.95 paper. 273 pages.

PAUL THOMAS

Hitchcock's Music by Jack Sullivan

Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) has, in Jack Sullivan's words, "the most sensational musical effects in film history, all the more so in that they are achieved by strings alone" (210). The excruciating shower sequence in particular works, in large measure, because Hitchcock superimposed jagged, screeching strings over the murder. Except—now it can be told—that he *didn't*. Hitchcock had wanted the murder to be silent, like those in *Blackmail* (1929) and *Sabotage* (1936). It was Bernard Herrmann, Hitchcock's musical director, who scored in the strings, in Hitchcock's absence and against his explicit instructions. When Herrmann showed him the result, Hitchcock (who had almost despaired of *Psycho* and was on the verge of cutting it up for his TV series) immediately saw that Herrmann had rescued it. "Improper suggestion, dear boy, improper suggestion," he said—you can almost *hear* him saying this—of his own earlier insistence on a silent murder.

That "*Psycho* might never have appeared on the big screen had its composer not insisted that Hitchcock listen to the terrifying, secretly composed shower cue" (xvii) is an arresting observation. It finds no place, incidentally, in an otherwise well-researched book, Stephen Rebello's 1990 *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho* (see my review, *Film Quarterly*, winter 1991–92). Sullivan by contrast appears to have missed little. He interviewed Herrmann (and many

sound cinema came, Mistinguett was a huge star of the stage, yet her mature age and the limited means of the French film industry meant that she only made one sound film, the disappointing *Rigolboche* (1936).

The centerpiece of Conway's research is the third and longest chapter, "Voices From the Past," in which she looks in great detail at the nostalgic chanteuse in several key 1930s films—archetypally Fréhel in *Pépé le Moko* (1937), in which the aged, overweight, and haggard singer, as she listens to a recording of her own earlier performance, poignantly evokes loss and yearning for youth—both hers and that of Pépé (Jean Gabin). This is where the book comes into its own. Not only do the films include some of the greatest of the period, but the chapter vindicates Conway's project. The focus on the *chanteuses* brings coherence and fresh insight into 1930s French filmmaking, gender, and cultural history. Conway discusses films that range from the canonical (*Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* [1936], *Pépé le Moko*) to inspired works which are normally neglected (*Coeur de Lilas* [1932], *Prison de femmes* [1938], *L'Entraîneuse* [1940]). The chapter also best demonstrates Conway's deft combination of wide-ranging contextual work with extremely fine textual analysis. In this respect, while all the analyses are excellent, I would pinpoint that of *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* where Conway's dissection of the song performed by Florelle, who plays Valentine, the laundry boss, manages to bring new perspectives on this much-debated film.

In microcosm, the analysis of *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* performs what the book does at large: shifting the spotlight from representations of the working class in French urban dramas as largely male, to a minority yet persistent female presence; as she says, "*Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* . . . emphasizes that women have been victimized doubly—through inequities related to both class and sexuality" (123). Conway continues in similar vein in chapter 4 (with Josephine Baker in *Zouzou* [1934], though strangely enough not in *Princesse Tam-Tam* [1935], and less well-known films like *Faubourg Montmartre* [1931], *Paris-Béguin* [1931], and *Le Bonheur* [1934]). Chapter 5, "Violent Spectatorship," brings the theme of the symbolic "threat" of the chanteuse to a logical conclusion, in films where they are literally or metaphorically murdered. Although the emphasis on the mechanical reproduction of the voice (records, the cinema) makes it a logical end point, the concluding analysis of *Prix de beauté* is less convincing, largely because its heroine is played by the American star Louise Brooks, making the film both extraordinary and atypical. This is offset however by the brilliant analysis of *La Tête d'un homme* (1933), in which Damia appears as a visually fleeting yet orally dominating presence.

In this excellent book there is little to criticize: a few spelling errors in the French quotes and the occasional mistranslation of song lyrics—the perils of tackling slang in another language. And given the subject, it would have made sense to organize the filmography around the chanteuses rather than chronologically. One could also (as ever!) wish for more illustrations. These minor quibbles apart, *Chanteuse in the City* authoritatively demonstrates the importance of the realist singer in French cinema, convincingly showing that these eminently nostalgic figures also spoke of feminine progress, change, and resistance. *Chanteuse in the City* takes its place among the key works on 1930s French cinema. © 2008 Ginette Vincendeau

GINETTE VINCENDEAU is Professor of Film Studies and Director of the Film Studies Programme at King's College London, and the author of *Jean-Pierre Melville: An American in Paris* (BFI Publishing, 2003) and *La Haine* (University of Illinois Press, 2005).

BOOK DATA Kelley Conway, *Chanteuse in the City: The Realist Singer in French Film*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. $60.00 cloth; $24.95 paper. 273 pages.

PAUL THOMAS

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others), and has certainly done his homework. *Hitchcock's Music* is a milestone book, likely to become the definitive study of its subject. It tells everything the curious reader would want to know about music in Hitchcock's films.

Sullivan leaves no stone unturned (though his book needs a glossary explaining musical terms to the film buff and filmic terms, not to mention plot summaries, to the more musical reader). He reminds us of how often music features as a theme in Hitchcock's films, and of how often Hitchcock peppers his dialogue with musical references. "Play something!" (*Murder!* [1930] reprised in *The 39 Steps* [1935]); "I must get that damned tune out of my head" (Hannay in *The 39 Steps* again; *The Lady Vanishes* [1939] is about the inability of everyone except Miss Foy to get "that damned tune" *into* their heads); "Whatever you do, please don't hum that tune any more" (Uncle Charlie in *Shadow of a Doubt* [1942]); "Where is that wonderful music coming from?" (Lisa in *Rear Window* [1954]); "I don't think Mozart's going to help at all" (Midge in *Vertigo* [1958]). The list goes on. In Sullivan's words, Hitchcock as "a product of the silent era . . . distrusted words but came to trust music . . . Music 'can tell you what people are thinking and feeling,' observed Herrmann, who worked with Hitchcock over a greater length of time than any other composer, 'and that is the real function of music. The whole recognition scene in *Vertigo*, for example, is eight minutes of cinema without dialogue or sound effects—just music and picture. I remember Hitchcock said to me, 'Well, music will do better than words here'. It does better in dozens of other Hitchcock films as well" (xix).

It does better, but not just as accompaniment to what the viewer sees (as in the examples from *Psycho* and *Vertigo* above). As Maurice Jarre, another musical collaborator, put it, "Hitchcock wanted counterpoint" between what the viewer sees and what the viewer hears, and tellingly uses music to this end, "not [as] sugar on the cake, like most Hollywood directors" (294). A vivid example of this counterpoint is in *The Birds* (1963), when Melanie Daniels sits outside the school house, facing the camera, and lights a cigarette. Behind her, large birds alight on the climbing structure in the childrens' playground, first one or two of them, then a few more . . . With every cut, there are more birds, gathering more ominously. Meanwhile, the children in the classroom are singing a nonsense ditty, "Risseldy, Rosseldy." As Sullivan puts it, "Throughout this daringly languid scene, the singing pours out of the school with monotonous cheeriness" (271). (This in a film where, up till now, "melody, harmony, rhythm, orchestration—all the traditional elements of Western music—simply vanish" [260] from the all-electronic score.) We are close here to Hitchcock's ideal of "pure cinema," and even—as Sullivan recognizes—to Eisensteinian montage. There is no dialogue, none of the "photographs of people talking" that Hitchcock despised. What we see in the schoolyard, and what we hear coming from the classroom, are unrelated until Hitchcock *brings* them into relation and creates meaning from their counterposition. (Evan Hunter, screenwriter of *The Birds*, asked "Why do the birds attack?" tersely replied: "Because Mr Hitchcock told them to").

Sullivan quotes Claudia Gorbman's *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Indiana University Press, 1987) to telling effect: "Hitchcock's examples point to the power of this music which blissfully lacks awareness or empathy; its very emotionlessness, juxtaposed with ensuing human catastrophe, is what provokes our emotional response" (200). Small wonder that "composers viewed [Hitchcock's] involvement with their art as deep and intense" and that Bernard Herrmann said that there were only "a handful of directors like Hitchcock who really know the score and fully recognize the importance of its relationship to a film" (xvi). Hitchcock "ignored the convention that film music should stay in the background" (xiv). Even so, he "viewed music in extremely broad terms: his definition encompassed street noise, dialogue (especially voiceover), sounds of the natural world, and sonic effects of all kinds, including those produced by electronic instruments [*The Birds* again]. It also included silence, the sudden awesome absence of music, capable of delivering the most powerful musical frisson of all" (xv). Until, that is, *Psycho* delivered an even more powerful one. © 2008 Paul Thomas

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BOOK DATA Jack Sullivan, *Hitchcock's Music*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006. $38.00 cloth; $20.00 paper. 384 pages.

CARYL FLINN

Unsettling Scores: German Film, Music, and Ideology by Roger Hillman

Roger Hillman's 1995 anthology, *Fields of Vision* (co-edited with Leslie Devereaux, University of California Press) includes a solid analysis of the soundtrack of Fassbinder's *Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979). Concentrating on Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, portions of which appear throughout, Hillman compares the opera's romanticized loves and fates with the film's dramatization of the disastrous material consequences of same. It is one of the best analyses of film music around.

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Unsettling Scores gives him the chance to pursue these ideas by examining art or "classical" music in the soundtracks of the New German Cinema, a movement for which the questions of national identity and its weighty past, particularly Nazism, lingered as phantoms in the then-present 1970s. Explaining his focus, Hillman notes classical music's rich heritage in Germany (28) and its historical relationships with national(ist) identity. His secondary aim is elucidate how the film scores offer a "counterexample" (1) to classical Hollywood practices. By refusing a subservient function, and by complicating the now-tired "parallel/counterpoint" debates, Hillman notes, these scores offer not just a different aesthetic but provide commentary on ideologically freighted issues such as national and cultural identities.

After opening with a quick look at some concepts in film-music studies—noting how musical citations work as acoustic "profilmic events"—Hillman explains art music's importance to directors like Kluge and Syberberg. The remaining chapters are case studies: five of individual films—*Our Hitler* (1977), *The Patriot* (1979), *Lili Marleen* (1981), and, somewhat counterintuitively, *Senso* (1954)—one of a composition (Beethoven's Ninth Symphony), and one of a director,Werner Herzog. The conclusion is brief (scarcely six pages) and, while it does not do as much to pull chapters together as the introduction does in setting them up, it does stress the possibility of opening—or "unsettling"—film scores further, to the point of unsettling disciplines. That breaching of categories is crucial to anyone interested in film music; it is equally important to any serious consideration of categories involved in concepts of nation, with their fictions of self-sufficiency, ethnic purity, insider/outsider status. In this way, Hillman suggests ways to move out of the German case study and apply its lessons elsewhere.

In economic and highly readable prose, Hillman identifies musical quotations, explains their significance, and moves on. The book's level is suitable for any serious student of German history and culture, film music, and the New German Cinema. Hillman references several musicologists and cinema scholars, but he does not engage with them in great detail, concentrating instead on the films to expose the cultural and historical work done by their soundtracks, a focus well served by his attentive close readings. This is where Hillman is at his best; his analysis of Fassbinder's *Lili Marleen* is especially strong, not just for discussing its use of composers like Mahler but for linking music to the film's critical preoccupations—notably the tension between high and "mass" classes and art forms, and the ways in which political resistance, gender, and ethnicity are involved in such tensions.

Most impressive is Hillman's level of analytical detail. In his discussion of Fassbinder's *Fear Eats the Soul* (1974), for instance, he identifies the obscure Jewish composer (and Auschwitz victim) of "Black Gypsy," the diegetic jukebox tune played and, in analyzing *Our Hitler*, he elucidates Syberberg's pairing of *Fidelio*, Beethoven's opera about a political prisoner, with the Ninth Symphony. Hillman's close familiarity with art music, especially opera, is evident throughout.

Somewhat less impressive is the book's organization, which, while not confusing, is certainly uneven. Hillman does not always situate readers or contextualize films with the care he gives to musical quotations (especially with Kluge's *The Patriot*); and he moves from topic to topic through distracting examples, going from *The Patriot* to other Kluge texts, for instance, via Buñuel. When he devotes a full chapter to Visconti's *Senso* to show how music signals nationality outside of German film, it is hard not to sense his project derailing a bit. When you devote just 160 pages to a subject as large as the New German Cinema, they should be used carefully.

Hillman's well-articulated focus on art music finds a great object in the New German Cinema, but the choice nonetheless has limits, especially since the directors he examines use *popular* music to equal effect. Obvious tunes such as "Die Wacht am Rhein" and "Lili Marleen" —which Hillman does discuss—reveal historical and nationalist connotations in as complex a manner as the more "upscale" art music does. Actually, Hillman underestimates how much his study usefully challenges music's high/low distinction when stressing how much art music—often purported to be "timeless" or "universal"—operates in profoundly historicized ways. Concentrating on existing art music also means passing insufficient comment on the films' original music, which is somewhat of a problem, especially in the case of Fassbinder, whose soundtracks are unthinkable without the music of Peer Raben. (That focus seems all the more desirable now that Fassbinder's estate is reworking portions of his *oeuvre*—and Raben's contributions in particular.)

Unsettling Scores recalls Dean Duncan's *Charms that Soothe* (Fordham University Press, 2003), which also explores classical music in cinema, though from a more general, methodological perspective. Both books provide a strong counterpart to the equally exciting focus on popular song dominating film-music scholarship of the last decade. An even closer companion piece, however, is my own 2003 study, *The New German Cinema: Music, History, and the Matter of Style* (University of California Press) whose aim is nearly identical to Hillman's. Hillman references that work only through a few asides in endnotes. Although this may

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seem a missed chance for dialogue, with a topic as resonant as music in the New German Cinema, there is certainly room for many voices. In fact, scholarship in sound in German culture—in and outside of the cinema—has been robust lately, and Hillman's devotion to opera and art music, along with the clarity with which he writes, is a welcome contribution to that conversation. © 2008 Caryl Flinn

CARYL FLINN is Professor of Women's Studies and Media Arts at the University of Arizona.

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The winner of our fiftieth-anniversary essay competition

HISTORY

KRISTIN THOMPSON

P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood: Screenwriting, Satires and Adaptations by Brian Taves

P. G. Wodehouse was so extraordinarily prolific in the realm of fiction that most casual readers today probably are unaware of his work in other areas. Fans usually know that he collaborated on scripts and lyrics for many stage plays, especially with librettist Guy Bolton and composer Jerome Kern on the historically important "Princess" musicals of the 1916 to 1924 period. This theatrical work inevitably pales, however, beside the dozens of novels and short-story collections, many of them stand-alones but also in the Jeeves-and-Wooster, Blandings Castle, Ukridge, Mulliner, and other series.

Wodehouse's relation to movies, television, and radio usually seems like a mere footnote in this prodigious career. Most of the numerous older adaptations of his stories and novels have either been lost or remain largely inaccessible. His two brief stints as a screenwriter in Hollywood, for MGM in 1931 and various studios in 1936–37, led to relatively minor contributions to films. (His first job was mainly providing additional dialogue to the scripts of others.) Remarks he made in a 1931 interview with the *Los Angeles Times* created a tempest in a teapot when he spoke of how little work MGM had required him to do for his hefty salary.

For such an important figure as Wodehouse, even this comparatively minor component of his life deserves a study of its own. Brian Taves has contributed a comprehensive and thoroughly researched monograph, revealing that there is considerably more to the subject than one might expect. As Taves argues convincingly, Wodehouse's own modesty about his contributions while in Hollywood—especially in that newspaper interview—exaggerated the enduring impression that his time there was virtually wasted.

As the book's subtitle indicates, there are really three separate subjects here.

First, there is Wodehouse's work writing directly for films. Although Taves establishes that this work was more significant than usually assumed, the period occupied a tiny portion of his career. This material will be of interest to those who want a complete biographical overview of Wodehouse. (Taves provides very sketchy information on the author's life, so a reader would be well advised to start with one of the standard biographies before tackling this book.)

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Second, there are the influences of Wodehouse's Hollywood experiences on his fiction. Such early 1930s stories as "The Nodder" and "Rise of Mina Nordstrom" are biting satires that reflect Wodehouse's unfortunate first Hollywood contract, which he thought of as making him into a well-paid hack. Later works like *The Old Reliable* and *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* reflect the filmmaking capital of the world in a mellower way. To me, Taves's explorations of the influences of Hollywood on Wodehouse and of the reasons for his changing view of the place are the most valuable parts of the book (chapters 3 and 6), since Wodehouse's claim to being a truly great author lies in his fiction. Taves gives a list of all the Hollywood-inspired stories and books in appendix 1.

Third, from 1915 to the present, many of Wodehouse's works have been the basis for film, television, and radio adaptations. Again, Taves lists all of these in appendix 2, which runs for fifty pages, roughly a quarter of the book. The author has assiduously tracked down and watched surviving prints, giving plot synopses, comparing versions, and assessing the quality of each. These analyses cumulatively make it clear that although some charming works have resulted, on the whole Wodehouse adaptations have all too often been mediocre and unfaithful to the letter and spirit of the originals. This is particularly the case for Wodehouse's crowning achievement, the Jeeves and Wooster series, where the hilarity of Bertie's first-person narration proves impossible to capture in performance.

For those who are interested in sampling these adaptations, however, Taves provides guidance as to which works are the most promising and how one might track them down for viewing or listening.

A second important facet of Taves's study of the history of Wodehouse adaptations is his revelation of how much money the author derived from the various options and contracts. Having studied the often considerable sums earned by Wodehouse's fiction, I was only vaguely aware of the importance of this other source of income (see especially pages 23 and 89). As a film archivist at the Library of Congress, Taves is ideally situated for tracing the various sales of the adaptation rights.

P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood is written in a neutral style that often simply summarizes a series of facts in chronological order with no connecting threads or attempts at transitions between paragraphs. The presupposition seems to be that the reader comes to the book with a keen interest in the facts. Given the length of the appendices, I suspect that the book will most often be perused as a reference tool rather than read straight through—though Wodehouse completists and especially those determined to track down adaptations of his works will tackle it.

As part of an effort to make its books more generally appealing, McFarland has provided an attractive red-black-and-white paperback cover with a faintly embossed photo from the 1936 film *Piccadilly Jim*.

Richard Briers, the actor who played Bertie in the 1970s radio series "What Ho, Jeeves" and other Wodehouse roles, has contributed an amusing foreword. © 2008 Kristin Thompson

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BOOK DATA Brian Taves, *P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood: Screenwriting, Satires and Adaptations*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006. $35.00 paper. 220 pages.

KRISTEN WHISSEL

American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices, ed. Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp

This new anthology makes an important contribution to scholarship on the most complex and fascinating period in the history of U.S. cinema. As the authors note in their introduction, the brief period between 1908 and 1917, "arguably witnessed the most profound transformation in American film history to date." Together, the essays in this anthology provide insight into a remarkable series of dynamic transformations that would shape the cinema until well after the end of World War II. These include the development of the conventions of narrative storytelling, the rise and fall of the single-reel short film and the nickel theater, the industry's shift from the east coast to southern California, the emergence of the star system, and the rise of the feature film and the "picture palace." In addition to scholarship on industrial changes, several essays focus the cinema's newly acquired power for giving pleasurable articulation to numerous social, economic, and cultural changes taking place in the U.S., while others pay attention to the increasing scrutiny cinema was subject to by social reformers and government censors.

The editors' organization of the anthology into three sections helps make sense of this often contradictory moment. The first section, titled "Defining Transition: Revision and Debate," features articles by Tom Gunning, Keil, Ben Brewster, and Ben Singer. The majority of the essays focus in one way or another on how the Motion Picture Patents Company's standardization of the single-reel film had important effects on film form and style, the regularization of distribution and exhibition practises, and the variety format that structured

Second, there are the influences of Wodehouse's Hollywood experiences on his fiction. Such early 1930s stories as "The Nodder" and "Rise of Mina Nordstrom" are biting satires that reflect Wodehouse's unfortunate first Hollywood contract, which he thought of as making him into a well-paid hack. Later works like *The Old Reliable* and *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* reflect the filmmaking capital of the world in a mellower way. To me, Taves's explorations of the influences of Hollywood on Wodehouse and of the reasons for his changing view of the place are the most valuable parts of the book (chapters 3 and 6), since Wodehouse's claim to being a truly great author lies in his fiction. Taves gives a list of all the Hollywood-inspired stories and books in appendix 1.

Third, from 1915 to the present, many of Wodehouse's works have been the basis for film, television, and radio adaptations. Again, Taves lists all of these in appendix 2, which runs for fifty pages, roughly a quarter of the book. The author has assiduously tracked down and watched surviving prints, giving plot synopses, comparing versions, and assessing the quality of each. These analyses cumulatively make it clear that although some charming works have resulted, on the whole Wodehouse adaptations have all too often been mediocre and unfaithful to the letter and spirit of the originals. This is particularly the case for Wodehouse's crowning achievement, the Jeeves and Wooster series, where the hilarity of Bertie's first-person narration proves impossible to capture in performance.

For those who are interested in sampling these adaptations, however, Taves provides guidance as to which works are the most promising and how one might track them down for viewing or listening.

A second important facet of Taves's study of the history of Wodehouse adaptations is his revelation of how much money the author derived from the various options and contracts. Having studied the often considerable sums earned by Wodehouse's fiction, I was only vaguely aware of the importance of this other source of income (see especially pages 23 and 89). As a film archivist at the Library of Congress, Taves is ideally situated for tracing the various sales of the adaptation rights.

P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood is written in a neutral style that often simply summarizes a series of facts in chronological order with no connecting threads or attempts at transitions between paragraphs. The presupposition seems to be that the reader comes to the book with a keen interest in the facts. Given the length of the appendices, I suspect that the book will most often be perused as a reference tool rather than read straight through—though Wodehouse completists and especially those determined to track down adaptations of his works will tackle it.

As part of an effort to make its books more generally appealing, McFarland has provided an attractive red-black-and-white paperback cover with a faintly embossed photo from the 1936 film *Piccadilly Jim*.

Richard Briers, the actor who played Bertie in the 1970s radio series "What Ho, Jeeves" and other Wodehouse roles, has contributed an amusing foreword. © 2008 Kristin Thompson

KRISTIN THOMPSON is an Honorary Fellow in the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the P. G. Wodehouse Estate's archivist. She is the author of *Wooster Proposes, Jeeves Disposes, or Le Mot Juste* (James H. Heineman, 1992).

BOOK DATA Brian Taves, *P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood: Screenwriting, Satires and Adaptations*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006. $35.00 paper. 220 pages.

KRISTEN WHISSEL

American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices, ed. Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp

This new anthology makes an important contribution to scholarship on the most complex and fascinating period in the history of U.S. cinema. As the authors note in their introduction, the brief period between 1908 and 1917, "arguably witnessed the most profound transformation in American film history to date." Together, the essays in this anthology provide insight into a remarkable series of dynamic transformations that would shape the cinema until well after the end of World War II. These include the development of the conventions of narrative storytelling, the rise and fall of the single-reel short film and the nickel theater, the industry's shift from the east coast to southern California, the emergence of the star system, and the rise of the feature film and the "picture palace." In addition to scholarship on industrial changes, several essays focus the cinema's newly acquired power for giving pleasurable articulation to numerous social, economic, and cultural changes taking place in the U.S., while others pay attention to the increasing scrutiny cinema was subject to by social reformers and government censors.

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moving-picture shows in small, storefront theaters. The authors provide detailed insight into the development of formal and stylistic features used by directors to create compelling, dynamic narratives within the single-reel format and how the gradual displacement of the one-reeler by multi-reel features in the mid-1910s transformed audiences' experience of cinema and impacted the livelihood of owners of small theaters. The authors make compelling arguments for the importance of the single-reel film in foregrounding the issues at stake in periodizing the transitional era. Singer's discussion of how the continued production of the single-reel film well after the ascendancy of the feature film supports the anthology's broader argument that one of the era's defining characteristics was its simultaneous accommodation of dominant, emergent, and residual paradigms.

Essays in the section titled "The Transitional Screen: New Genres, Cultural Shifts" explore transitional-era genres and their engagement with social and industrial change. Jacqueline Stewart and Lauren Rabinovitz analyze interracial and slapstick comedies, respectively, in relation to changing race and gender relations and new forms of mobility as women and black Americans increasingly occupied the public sphere in pursuit of work and leisure. Richard Abel shows how the extremely popular Western used the dynamic action of the cowboy and cowgirl, and the unique landscape of the American west, to help construct a distinctly American "national" cinema able to compete with Danish, French, and Italian features at home and overseas. Though most closely associated with the cinema of attractions, Jennifer Peterson argues, the travelogue's ongoing display of distant landscapes during the transitional era did not necessarily have the educative effect desired by reformers, but instead inspired in audiences a dreamlike state.

The third and final section focuses on "The Industry in Transition: Changing Institutions and Audiences." J. A. Lindstrom analyzes the nickelodeon's participation in new forms of urban development in Chicago that helped integrate people into new communities; Lee Grieveson shows how the censorship struggles during the period reveal an emerging consensus among reformers and censors that the proper social function of the cinema was the provision of "harmless entertainment" which rejected the cinema's potential as propaganda. In keeping with the editors' argument that "the transitional period defines itself by the instability it introduces," Constance Balides shows how the sociologist Simon Patten found "vitality" in the same moving-picture shows that other reformers castigated as exploitative. Scott Curtis demonstrates how mistrust and competition between the various members of the MPPC undermined its longevity. Roberta Pearson discusses how the cinema's succession of theater as the most popular form of commercialized leisure ultimately liberated theater from the tastes of the masses.

The range of approaches on display in the collection and the detailed historical research undertaken by most of the authors give extraordinary insight into the social, economic, and cultural struggles that took place within, around, and through the moving pictures during this tumultuous period. Moreover, the anthology includes discussions of canonical films such as Griffith's *The Lonedale Operator* (Biograph, 1911), and *Rube and Mandy Go to Coney Island* (Edison, 1903) as well as less well-known but equally important films like the interracial kiss comedy, *Under the Old Apple Tree* (AM&B, 1907), the cowgirl Western *Una of the Sierras* (Vitagraph, 1912), and the "farce of frenzied finance," *Ready Money* (Apfel/Lasky, 1914). Indeed, discussions of the latter films readily suggest new avenues of potential research. The strength of this anthology is not surprising, given that a number of the authors and both of the editors have written monographs on American cinema of the 1910s, including Stamp's *Movie-Struck Girls* (Princeton University Press, 2000), Stewart's *Migrating to the Movies* (University of California Press, 2005), Abel's *The Red Rooster Scare* (University of California Press, 1999), Grieveson's *Policing Cinema* (University of California Press, 2004), and Keil's *Early American Cinema in Transition* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2002). The introduction provides an excellent overview of the period, helping to contextualize the scholarship that follows. Though not a conventional feature of such collections, the anthology would benefit from a conclusion that synthesizes the arguments found within and provides some context for the era's closing. Despite this, it is an excellent collection. © 2008 Kristen Whissel

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BOOK DATA Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp (eds), *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. $60.00 cloth; $24.95 paper.

ARTHUR KNIGHT

Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams: The Story of Black Hollywood by Donald Bogle

Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams, Donald Bogle's most recent book, is a sort of companion volume to the author's seminal *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (Continuum). In that book, first published in 1973 and now in its fourth edition, Bogle argued that "the essence of black film history is not found in the stereotyped role [which all black actors have played] but in what certain talented actors have done with the stereotype" (xxiii). Though he makes the case and the connection to the argument of *Toms, Coons* only implicitly, in *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams* Bogle finds the resources for such resistant performance in the rich and swirling social and cultural history of African American Los Angeles.

It may come as a surprise to some that for Bogle "black Hollywood" ceases to exist sometime around 1960 and that his narrative is one of decline. However, those familiar with *Toms, Coons* and Bogle's authoritative biography of Dorothy Dandridge (Amistad, 1999) will recognize his nostalgia and abiding interest in high-style glamor, both of which seem inexorably shaped by Dandridge's 1965 death in West Hollywood, six years after her last role in a major Hollywood film.

By choosing to end his story when he does, Bogle gains immensely in focus. He provides impressive, conscientiously researched detail on a wide range of characters—including not just performers but behind-the-scenes talent, agents, newspaper publishers, journalists, architects, club owners, and many others—and he places them and their work in their social milieu. There are passages when he could have been more concise, but Bogle writes with vigor, draws from such a trove of materials, and displays such a yearning to get inside the era that his urge to expand is easy to forgive. One strength of the book—though it is a qualified strength—is that it verges on being an oral history. Bogle has clearly interviewed, often more than once, a huge number of people and he often lets their voices tell the story. It would have been nice if Bogle could have been a bit more rigorous in his scholarly apparatus and explanation of his method (and one hopes he will one day deposit his interviews somewhere for consultation by others), but he has clearly done his research and is respectful but insistent in noting claims he cannot corroborate.

However, by choosing to end his story when he does and by choosing to highlight the voices of his subjects, Bogle also amplifies his nostalgia and diminishes his ability to analyze. He does not soft-pedal Hollywood's (or L.A.'s) racism, but the book does exude a sort of roseate glow. The nostalgia would be undermined if the book made room for other voices—for example, African American Angelinos who had nothing to do with the entertainment elite—and some accounting of the large sociocultural shifts of the 1960s and 70s. Nevertheless, *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams* is a good and useful book that deserves a second volume. © 2008 Arthur Knight

ARTHUR KNIGHT directs the Film Studies Program at the College of William & Mary. He is currently researching the cultural history of African Americans and fame.

BOOK DATA Donald Bogle, *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams: The Story of Black Hollywood*. New York: One World/Ballantine Books, 2005. $26.95 cloth; $15.95 paper. 432 pages.

WILLIAM PAUL

Moving Image Technology: From Zoetrope to Digital by Leo Enticknap

Moving Image Technology: From Zoetrope to Digital is an ambitious and exhaustively encyclopedic attempt to account for all the technology underpinning moving-image production and exhibition. As the title specifies "moving image" rather than "moving picture," the book aims to be wide-ranging, seeking to provide "a historical overview of the role of technology within the economic, industrial, political and cultural roles of moving images" (3).

Nevertheless, history is not an organizing principle here so much as technology itself, and this turns out to be a crucial distinction. While the overall shape might appear to be historical to the extent that the first chapter on "film" actually goes back to the earliest moving-image optical toys while the last chapter centers on "new moving image technologies," each chapter is centered on a specific technology or group of technologies such as sound, cinematography, and color. This means that the book constantly moves back and forth through historical time as it traces the development of each particular technology. And technology is construed in a truly exhaustive manner, which presents a different kind of problem. The technologies behind production and exhibition should be of interest to anyone generally interested in the history of motion pictures, but an entire chapter on film-preservation technology seems overly specialized, although I doubt if anything here would be news to actual specialists in the field.

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In similar fashion, Enticknap tries to treat each technology exhaustively, but in point of fact not all of his technological

categories are created equal. No one would deny the importance of the shift from silent to sound film, but it is hard to determine what importance Enticknap wants us to find in the shifts from nitrate to acetate to polyester base. The very breadth of the technologies covered here raises questions that should have been asked, but are not. Why, exactly, are all these technologies worth considering? Further, at a more theoretical level, can we resolve the tension between technology determining realizable goals and the goals determining the shape of the technology?

Enticknap does begin with a theoretical consideration that would seem to suggest an awareness of the latter question. In the introduction, as he lays out his area of inquiry and possible reasons for undertaking it, Enticknap describes a class in which a student, "an enthusiastic advocate of 'feminist film theory'," analyzes "an excerpt from a low-budget British crime melodrama from the 1930s … [in which] a male detective interrogates his female suspect while leaning over the chair in which the latter is sitting, appearing to shout at her. The sequence is lit in such a way that the protagonist appears to cast a long, menacing shadow over the subject of interrogation" (2). The hapless feminist—for, it turns out, she was being set up—not unreasonably sees this as an image of domination. The teacher, however, soon reveals a very different reason: "The microphone recording the dialogue . . . had been concealed in a vase of flowers behind the chair in which she was sitting. Furthermore, being a primitive 1930s microphone, its sensitivity was limited, thereby requiring the detective to position his mouth as close as he could to it (hence leaning over the occupied chair) and speaking as loudly as possible (hence the menacing voice)." Enticknap cannot contain his sarcasm: "In this instance an understanding of the electromagnetic properties of microphone technology would have been rather more useful than the Freudian claptrap which was inflicted on us that afternoon."

With this, Enticknap posits a fairly straightforward technological determinism that dominates much of the book. But is this really the simple either/or case that he presents it to be? The technology might have imposed extreme restrictions on the director, but did it really dictate only *one* possible way of staging this scene? It is impossible to verify or reject Enticknap's claims independently because he never identifies the actual film. But, at a minimum, even sight-unseen I would want to note that the limitations of the microphone did not eliminate the possibility of fill lights to reduce or eliminate the "menacing shadow." And I would want to question if early sound technology mandated that all dialogue scenes require one speaker to be standing, the other sitting. As Enticknap presents it, the argument for technology as a determining aesthetic factor is reductive to the point of being meaningless.

Nevertheless, I do not want to reject all consideration of the extent to which technology may play a determinative role in film style. Consider the example of rubber numbering (something, for all his completist ambitions, Enticknap oddly does not cover), the stamping of a timecode on image and sound film strips introduced in the early 1930s to ensure perfect synchronization even in highly cut sequences. Barry Salt has observed a decrease in the average shot length following the implementation of rubber numbers, clearly suggesting that technology led to the aesthetic change. On the other hand, Salt also notes a tendency towards longer takes in 1939–40, for which it would be harder to find simple technological cause and effect. Why is any technology adopted in a specific period? And how does stylistic change come about?

Enticknap does occasionally invoke cultural, sociological, political, economic, and industrial influences, but other than cursory attention to economic and industrial conditions he actually has nothing to say beyond the general invocation. Most often for him, technology is its own determinant with its own history. I would prefer overdetermination, leaving open the possibility for multiple causation. And I would prefer a little more sense that arriving at a complete understanding of how aesthetic trends evolve must always remain a matter for further research, subject to whatever revisions and expansions new historical research offers. Technology as the determinant of aesthetics or aesthetics determinant of technology is ultimately a chicken-and-egg problem that can never be fully answered, but it is one that needs to be pursued as we try to understand the evolution of film style. © 2008 William Paul

WILLIAM PAUL is a professor of Film and Media Studies at Washington University in St. Louis. He is the author of *Ernst Lubitsch's American Comedy* (Columbia University Press, 1983) and *Laughing Screaming: Modern Hollywood Horror and Comedy* (Columbia University Press edn, 1995).

BOOK DATA Leo Enticknap, *Moving Image Technology: From Zoetrope to Digital.* London: Wallflower Press. $80.00 cloth; $24.00 paper. 280 pages.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

On the history of *Film Quarterly*
Paranoid Park
Redacted

NOTHINGNESS, SPECTACLE, CINEMA

Nothing Matters. To define nihilism, to demarcate a term that argues against objective meaning, may itself be paradoxical, even self-defeating. Instead, Kevin Stoehr rewardingly explores its diverse resonances in modern popular culture, maintaining that nihilism is not merely a rejection of the essential value of things or ideas. He is particularly concerned with the distinction between what Nietzsche called active and passive nihilism, where active (or healthy) nihilism overcomes the pathological alienation of passive nihilism. Stoehr traces the differing degrees of nihilism in film and television, but the book is oddly organized. It proceeds neither chronologically, from Orson Welles to John Ford to Stanley Kubrick to Richard Linklater, nor sequentially, from illustrations of passive to active nihilism. The early chapters function in pairs: film noir's dark pessimism is in dialogue with Linklater's animated navigation of an alienating landscape in *Waking Life* (2001); faith in love in *The Crying Game* (1992) counterbalances the belief in nothing at all in *Citizen Kane* (1941). Still, the shifts between active and passive nihilism are sometimes hasty and disorienting. The most compelling arguments occur in the chapters on Ford and Kubrick, the latter appearing as the ultimate cinematic embodiment of active nihilism. While Ford is no nihilist per se—indeed, his celebration of the enduring essence of the American west is precisely what nihilism rejects—Stoehr emphasizes how his traditionalism is destabilized by "the possibility of nihilistic loss and despair [that] lies always just beyond the fence-post" (118). Finally, complicating Nietzschean thought with Ricoeur's work on defilement and Heidegger's notion of angst, Stoehr illustrates how Kubrick's cinema discovers the potential in "nihilistic horror" and affirms, like Camus's Sisyphus, laboring in the absence of philosophical certainties.

Much Ado about Nothing? Sarah Higley and Jeffrey Weinstock's edited collection on *The Blair Witch Project* treats the 1999 release of this low-budget thriller as a cultural event—one that raises significant questions about aesthetics, genre, spectatorship, independent production, and more. As a faux-documentary about immaterial horrors, the film is arguably also about nothingness. But whether as a "source of celebration or a fatal flaw" (18), Higley and Weinstock argue—borrowing their title from Wallace Stevens's haunting poem "The Snow Man"—it is a nothingness worth exploring. J. P. Telotte's opening essay on cinema and the Internet, originally published in *Film Quarterly*, incisively traces the implications of *Blair Witch*'s web-based marketing success for Hollywood's relationship with new media. Also striking is David Banash's argument about the technological apparatus's failure in recording "reality," which becomes the true horror of the film. Although some of the twelve essays tread on familiar terrain, from issues of authorship and intertextuality to *fin de siècle* cultural anxieties, the book ends with two remarkable pieces on the film's exploration of America's geographical and psychological landscapes. Especially notable is Weinstock's concluding piece, which wraps up this timely collection by examining *Blair Witch*'s navigation of geographical, temporal, and ontological "lostness" at the turn of the millennium.

Real/Reel Spectacle. The new millennium's defining moment, the spectacularly real destruction of the World Trade Center, becomes a point of orientation for Geoff King's edited collection on the dialectical relationship between two extremities of popular media, Hollywood's over-the-top spectacle and reality television's unmediated "real," which exist, as King argues in the introduction, "in a state of mutual implication" in contemporary audio-visual culture (21). Unlike postmodern theory's more sweeping assertions about the blurring of boundaries between reality and media spectacle, these essays consider images of 9/11, reality television, and cinematic spectacles in three independent sections, creating a fine dialogue among them without being reduced to a single thesis. The first section deserves special attention, for it offers a comprehensive exploration of 9/11 as a site of spectacle, ideology, and catastrophe. Building on Guy Debord's and his own earlier work, Douglas Kellner illustrates the capacity of media spectacle to fully structure our political, economic, and social lives. Then, Lee Rodney reads 9/11 as a "breaking news" event and, after Slavoj Žižek, as wish-fulfillment; King's essay explores our tendency to narrativize 9/11 by filling in the gaps of its initial coverage; Kathy Smith wonders how 9/11 changes our relationship to fiction; and, following Walter Benjamin,

Film Quarterly, Vol. 61, No. 4, pps 92–93, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2008 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2008.61.4.92

Dean Lockwood notes that spectacle contains the seeds of its demise. The subsequent sections demonstrate how reality television often stages itself as a spectacle, whereas Hollywood spectacles incorporate an innate claim to authenticity. These genuinely original essays provide insights into our present moment's fixation on the spectacle of the real.

Contradicting Stories. Writing in another era, when cinema was hailed as a revolutionary art form that would reveal the true nature of reality, Jean Epstein famously proclaimed, "Cinema is true. A story is a lie." For Epstein, cinema represented the triumph of objects over plots, of visual pleasure over narrative closure. Still, images have never been fully estranged from cinema's dramatic progression, contends Jacques Rancière; rather, its aesthetic and representational poetics have been mutually constitutive. So Epstein's elevation of the image as cinema's essence is itself a fable, since he arrives at that essence only by suppressing the narrative. And Epstein is not alone in "making a fable with another" (5). In privileging the cinematic image, Rancière argues, film philosophers from Epstein to André Bazin to Gilles Deleuze to Jean-Luc Godard have missed how the truth about cinema lies in the negotiation between the image and the story. It is these "paradoxes of the film fable" (15) that Rancière sets out to explore: in Eisenstein's struggle to aestheticize communism, Murnau's creation of conflicting visibilities in his silent *Tartuffe* (1925), Fritz Lang's staged confrontation between cinema and television in *While the City Sleeps* (1956), Anthony Mann's and Nicholas Ray's thwarting of narrative continuity, Godard's treatment of cinema and Marxism as differing conceptions of art in *La Chinoise* (1967), and Chris Marker's fusion of autonomous images with voiceover commentary to create a new "documentary fiction." Rancière's approach is auteurist, but this slim yet wide-ranging volume offers neither a theory nor history of cinema. Instead, it proposes a method of reading the interplay of moving images and tales; as Rancière believes, cinema reveals its truth somewhere in between them.

Old England, New Left. Another kind of interplay, between cinema and capitalism, is at the heart of Paul Dave's provocative exploration of the renewed interest in issues of economics and class and their relationship to national identity in contemporary British cinema. Influenced by Žižek, Dave traces "the ideological impact of this era of capitalist triumphalism" (161) on the British class system in a range of current mainstream, arthouse, and experimental films. In recent heritage films like *The Tichborne Claimant* (1998), Dave uncovers an unresolved conflict between a stable Old Englishness and an unsettled national character. In romantic comedies like *Notting Hill* (1999) and *Sliding Doors* (1998), produced under the economic influence of the American film industry, he sketches how London becomes transformed into a cozy, albeit fragile, middle-class idyll. Working-class communities resurface in films like *The Full Monty* (1997) and *Billy Elliot* (2000), but they serve as no more than social backdrop, for in the age of neo-liberalism, the labor crisis becomes an individual rather than communal problem. Similarly, while *Trainspotting* (1996) presents a breakdown of older notions of national cohesion, it has no radical agenda, for it replaces an earlier social realism with an aesthetic of "black magic realism." After working his way through representations of the various strata of the British class system, Dave demonstrates how Bruce Robinson's *Withnail & I* (1987) looks back with ambivalence at the exuberant countercultural classlessness of the late 1960s, while the films of Patrick Keiller, Chris Petit, and Iain Sinclair resist political and economic neo-liberalism. Although the book does not fully flesh out the collision between notions of Englishness and Britishness, Dave's work is a welcome contribution.

BOOK DATA

Kevin L. Stoehr, *Nihilism in Film and Television: A Critical Overview from* Citizen Kane *to* The Sopranos. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006. $35.00 paper. 226 pages.

Sarah L. Higley and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (eds), *Nothing That Is: Millennial Cinema and the* Blair Witch *Controversies*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2004. $27.95 paper. 256 pages.

Geoff King (ed.), *The Spectacle of the Real: From Hollywood to Reality TV and Beyond*. Bristol: Intellect, 2005. $40.00 paper. 234 pages.

Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables*. Translated by Emiliano Battista. Oxford: Berg, 2006. $109.95 cloth; $29.95 paper. 208 pages.

Paul Dave, *Visions of England: Class and Culture in Contemporary Cinema*. Oxford: Berg, 2006. $99.95 cloth; $29.95 paper. 288 pages.

RASHNA WADIA RICHARDS will begin as Assistant Professor and Director of Film Studies at Rhodes College in fall 2008.